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IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

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LAMENTS FOR THE LOST IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Edited by

Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell



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JMT & MJT

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(2008); *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (2007); *Solomon and Marcolf; Letters of Peter Abelard, Beyond the Personal* (2008); and (with Bridget Balint) *A Garland of Satire, Wisdom, and History: Latin Verse from Twelfth-Century France* (2008).

SINGING A SONG OF SORROW: TROPES OF LAMENT

Anne L. Klinck

Writing a contextualizing paper for a collection of essays on lament, one ventures rather hesitantly into very deep water. This is a pretty overwhelming topic, however it is approached. Lament can be defined more narrowly, as part of the ritual of funerals, or more loosely, as an expression of loss for any significant deprivation. Personal and communal, secular and religious, formal and informal, it merges on the one hand into resigned consolation, on the other into angry cursing or the rage that wreaks revenge. Yet again, especially in the mouths of women, it overlaps with love complaint. Lament draws on the whole spectrum of human attachments: erotic, convivial, familial, spiritual. It may be the product of a genuine social or personal need; it may be a literary exercise; and on occasion it is both. As the papers brought together in this collection show, the subject can be found, often in less than obvious ways, in an enormous variety of texts, prose and verse, sometimes assuming importance even when no actual lament is voiced. In this overview I suggest a broad context for the issues taken up in the essays that follow. Looking back to antiquity, and forward to the Renaissance and beyond, as well as commenting on medieval materials, I want to draw some threads together and outline some patterns. Inevitably, my observations will reflect my own knowledge and interests, so I will refer especially to English lament, speaking mainly about poetry, and about the voices of women in particular.¹

¹ My take on lament is thus very different from that found in R. Clifton Spargo's *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), which examines modern laments, notably for Holocaust victims, against a background of canonical early and later modern poetry and cites Orpheus, Niobe, and Antigone, and more particularly Hamlet, as among 'literature's most famous mourners' (p. 39). Foreign quotations will be followed by translations (my own unless otherwise indicated). Also, many of the examples

Up to this point, I have spoken of 'lament', rather than 'elegy' or *planctus*, both terms suggesting a literary composition with a classical background.² Anglo-Saxonists may think of a group of Old English poems — *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and others — which modern scholars have called elegies.³ The word is problematic in this application, because not all the poems so designated are laments, none of them are noticeably constructed on classical models, and none are poems of commemoration for a particular person who has died. However, they do draw on a nexus of melancholy themes, especially the pains of exile and the lost joys of the communal hall, and most of them are elegiac in the broad sense of reflecting upon loss and transience.⁴ The ancients derived *elegos* 'sad song' from *e, e legein* 'to say woe, woe',⁵ but the elegiac form, distichs consisting of hexameter followed by pentameter, was not particularly associated with mourning in the earliest elegiac poets, Archilochus, for example.⁶ In Greek and Roman poetry, *elegeia* are poems

mentioned here are in *An Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. and trans. by Anne L. Klinck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

² For later English elegy in relation to its classical ancestors, see G. W. Pigman III, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); also Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), esp. chap. 1, 'Interpreting the Genre: The Elegy and the Work of Mourning', pp. 1–37. For an excellent brief account of medieval *planctus* as 'a many-sided and fertile genre, both vernacular and Latin', with a list of examples, see Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 27–29.

³ Three of the OE elegies (*The Wanderer*, *The Ruin*, and *The Seafarer*) are discussed in Mary Ramsey, 'Dustsceawung: Texting the Dead in the Old English Elegies', this volume.

⁴ See *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992; repr. 2001), pp. 11–12, 225–30. References to the OE poems that we call the 'elegies' are based on this edition. See also *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994).

⁵ See the explanation in the Byzantine *Etymologicon Magnum*, ed. by Thomas Gaisford (Oxford: [n.pub.], 1848), 326. 49.

⁶ Archilochus is the earliest recorded poet to compose elegiacs, but he also worked in other metres and is more often classified as an iambist. For Archilochus, see *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, ed. by Douglas E. Gerber, Loeb Classical Library (hereafter Loeb) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), and for the other early Greek elegists, *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, ed. by Douglas E. Gerber, Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Where feasible, I refer, as here, to the bilingual editions in the Loeb Classical Library series. Archilochus fragments are numbered according to the standard edition by Martin West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, Oxford Classical Texts, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971–72).

in elegiac metre — which did come to be associated with commemoration of the dead and with sadness, but wasn't always so used. Love elegy, for instance, is a significant genre in classical Latin poetry.⁷ As for *planctus*, in ancient usage the word meant any kind of lamentation, but in medieval times it came to suggest a range of formal laments, secular and religious, in Latin, on set topics, or the vernacular compositions modelled on them. Peter Dronke, especially, has done substantial work on these medieval poems.⁸

One typical structure for lament is a balance between despair and consolation, the latter ranging from a resigned stoicism to an active hope and preparation for better things in the next world. I have noted this pattern in some of the Old English elegies, specifically *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, and *Deor*.⁹ In the first three, there is a movement from personal suffering, through meditation on transience, to a contemplation of the eternal. In *Deor*, the consolatory movement is accomplished within each stanza, each ending with 'Ðæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg' (loosely 'That passed away; so may this'). Boethius's long, mainly prose, *Consolation of Philosophy* provides a likely background of thought, especially in the idea of a Fate which is ultimately subject to the control of divine Providence (book 4, prose 6).¹⁰ Boethius's book, translated by King Alfred (or,

⁷ Practised especially by Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid. The Latin love elegy as a genre has been examined in Archibald A. Day, *The Origins of Latin Love-Elegy* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1938; repr. 1972), and Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1969).

⁸ In Dronke's chapter on Peter Abelard's cycle of Latin poems elaborated from biblical material (*Poetic Individuality*, pp. 114–49); and Section IV in the collection of his articles entitled *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), pp. 345–489. Dronke in fact suggests that these laments in a learned tradition are also indebted to undocumented popular sources. See the following items in his *Intellectuals and Poets*: 'The Lament of Jephtha's Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality' (1971, co-authored with Margaret Alexiou), pp. 345–88 (p. 388); 'Dido's Lament: From Medieval Latin Lyric to Chaucer' (1986), pp. 431–56 (p. 455); 'Laments of the Maries: From the Beginnings to the Mystery Plays' (1988), pp. 457–89 (p. 489). Dronke subdivides medieval *planctus* into six categories: women's laments, dirges, laments of exiles, fictional narratives, biblical themes, and men's *complaintes d'amour* (*Poetic Individuality*, pp. 27–29). Most of his examples in the first category are included in my *Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Woman's Song*.

⁹ See *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 226.

¹⁰ A very late Roman work; Boethius died in 524 CE. For the Latin text and English translation, see *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, Loeb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). For Boethian influence on the OE elegies, see *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 234.

more likely, under his auspices) and by Chaucer, was enormously influential throughout the Middle Ages.¹¹

Even when controlled by Christian spirituality, lament can be very dark, as we see in the melancholic strain that is especially characteristic of the European Catholic Middle Ages: sober reflection on the vanity of this world and the inevitability of leaving it. *Contemptus mundi*, the product of an asceticism that medieval society embraced and admired (in theory anyway), is alien to most modern Western thinking, but an abundant, if often forbidding, literature arose from it, in Latin and the vernaculars. This topos bridges the shift from the Anglo-Saxon to the Middle English period with a striking continuity.¹² It finds expression in horrific evocations of the rotting corpse like those in the Old English addresses of the Soul to the Body,¹³ *The Grave* (a transitional text),¹⁴ and the thirteenth-century *When the turf is thy tour*.¹⁵ The extremely widespread motif 'Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt' (Where are those who were before us?), for which the locus classicus is Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma de lamentatione animae peccatoris*,¹⁶ animates some memorable poetry: The Wanderer's 'Hwær cwom mearg? hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom

¹¹ See *The Medieval Boethius*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987). For the OE Boethius, see *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' 'De consolazione philosophiae'*, ed. by Walter J. Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899); for Chaucer's version, see *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 397–469, and *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993).

¹² M. J. Toswell, 'Structures of Sorrow: The Lament Psalms in Medieval England', this volume, notes a similar continuity in the Old and Middle English prose Psalter tradition.

¹³ Unless otherwise indicated, references to OE poems are to *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–53).

¹⁴ Edited in Arnold Schröer, 'The Grave', *Anglia*, 5 (1882), 289–90.

¹⁵ Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), no. 4044; see also Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), and Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London: British Library, 2005). These three volumes are hereafter collectively referred to as *Index*. Text in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), no. 30.

¹⁶ Isidore's book dates from the early seventh century. Published in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne; Paris: Garnier, 1844–65), LXXXIII, cols 825–26. For discussion of the *ubi sunt* topos with particular reference to Isidore, see J. E. Cross, 'Ubi Sunt Passages in Old English: Sources and Relationships', *Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund Årsbok* (1956), 23–44, and Cross, 'On *The Wanderer* lines 80–84: A Study of a Figure and a Theme', *Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund Årsbok* (1958–59), 75–110.

maþþumgyfa?’ (What has become of the steed, the rider, the treasure-giver?) (line 92), the grimly admonitory *Where beth they biforen us weren?*,¹⁷ and François Villon’s fifteenth-century *Ballad of Dead Ladies*, best known to modern Anglophone readers in Rossetti’s version with its famous refrain ‘Where are the snows of yesteryear?’ (translating ‘Ou sont les neiges d’antan?’).¹⁸

Loss of youthful beauty and vigour, and of life itself, is treated as the human condition, general rather than particular, although individual human beings face it with an intensity that ranges from the poignant, in the Wanderer’s rhetorical questions, to the macabre, in the depiction of Gifer the ‘Ravenous’ worm (*Soul and Body II* 111–17a),¹⁹ to take a couple of Old English examples. What is lamented here is ‘the blight that man was born for’, as Gerard Manley Hopkins says in ‘Spring and Fall’. In the medieval context, and very often later too, such poetry is always implicitly moralistic, even if, like Villon’s poem, it stops short of moralizing. There is a solution, not in *this* world, but ‘yonder’ — Hopkins again, in ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’.²⁰ *Sic transit gloria mundi*, pronounced at the coronation of popes, is a sentiment that predates Christianity, but as a melancholy comment that is also an admonition, it is quintessentially medieval.²¹

Whereas meditations on the transience of the world are broad in theme and diverse in manner — though there are certain typical formulas — the rituals associated with funerals, on the other hand, are narrowly focused, formulaic, practical rather than reflective, and clearly linked to cult activities.²² Cultic lament perhaps

¹⁷ *Index*, no. 3310. Text in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, no. 48.

¹⁸ Villon text in *François Villon: Complete Poems*, ed. and trans. by Barbara N. Sargent-Baur (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Rossetti translation in *Collected Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: Dent, 1999), p. 253.

¹⁹ Text in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George P. Krapp and Elliott Van K. Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. 174–78.

²⁰ For the Hopkins poems, see *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. by Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 152 and 155–56.

²¹ ‘Thus passes away the glory of the world.’ This particular part of the papal coronation ceremony may actually be post-medieval. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. by Charles G. Herbermann and others, 18 vols (New York: Gilmary Society, 1913), XIII, 679, under ‘Sedia Gestatoria’ (the papal throne).

²² On the origin of funerary lament in myth and ritual, see Joseph Harris, “‘Myth to Live By’ in *Sonatorrek*”, this volume. On the ironic use of funeral rituals in *Beowulf*, especially laying out with military gear, see Anne Savage, ‘The Grave, the Sword, and the Lament: Mourning for the Future in *Beowulf*’, this volume. And, on Anglo-Saxon graves, with their choice of grave goods, as constructed texts, see Ramsey, ‘*Dustsceawung*’, this volume.

began with the repetition of a ritual cry like *ailinos!* ‘Alas for Linus!’ and *ō ton Adōnin!* ‘Woe for Adonis!’. Mythical figures — such as the partners of fertility goddesses — are lamented in terms of personal loss. Homer mentions the Linus song (*Iliad* 18. 570),²³ as does the late Greek antiquarian Athenaeus (14. 618d).²⁴ Actually, the cry *ailinos* may have originated as an instinctive accompaniment to breast-beating.²⁵ Two fragments of Sappho derive from Adonis worship, one (Frag. 168 Voigt) merely the ritual cry.²⁶ In the other, Aphrodite and her maidens engage in dialogue, creating a mini-drama where women performers bewail Adonis’s death as if it were their own loss: ‘κατθνάσκει, Κυθήρη, ἄβρος Ἄδωνις· τί κε θεῖμεν; | καττύπτεσθε, κόραι, καὶ κατερείκεσθε χιτῶνας’ (‘He is dying, Cytherea, graceful Adonis. What shall we do?’ | ‘Beat your breasts, maidens, and tear your garments’) (Frag. 140 Voigt). More elaborate laments feature strophic form and refrain, as in the Hellenistic *Epitaph for Adonis* by Bion, with its variations on ‘αἰάω τὸν Ἄδωνιν, ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις’ (I lament Adonis. He is dead, comely Adonis), and its affecting Aphrodite voluptuously grieving for her beautiful boy.²⁷

The appropriation of the mythical as a vehicle for personal emotion suggests that in early Greece cultic and public laments were intimately connected with private ones, and perhaps fused with them. The *Iliad* depicts female mourners for Patroclus chiming in with their own sorrows (*Iliad* 19. 301–02). This ancient practice of reciting one’s own sufferings as a formal ritual act which effects a kind

²³ Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. and trans. by A. T. Murray, rev. by William F. Wyatt, Loeb, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Homer is virtually undatable, but these days often assigned to the eighth century BCE.

²⁴ Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae* (Philosophers at the Banquet), an extremely long book of table-talk, was written around 200 CE. In connection with different kinds of traditional songs, he quotes a writer of the sixth century BCE to the effect that the *ailinos* was sung by women at the loom. See *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists*, ed. and trans. by C. R. Gulick, Loeb, 7 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–41).

²⁵ See Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, trans. by Corinne Pache (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 60.

²⁶ Sappho was composing around 600 BCE. Text in *Sappho et Alcaeus*, ed. by Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam: Polak and van Gennep, 1971). The ritual cry is simply *ō ton Adōnin!* For Sappho’s poetry, see also vol. 1 of *Greek Lyric*, ed. and trans. by David A. Campbell, Loeb, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982–93).

²⁷ See *Bion of Smyrna: The Fragments and the ‘Adonis’*, ed. and trans. by J. D. Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); my translation. Bion lived between the mid-second and mid-first centuries BCE. On the origins of the Adonis cult in the ancient Near [Middle] East, see *ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

of therapy can be traced through the medieval period too. Possibly a background in the incantation of personal woes on ritual occasions lies behind the Old English elegiac formula 'Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre' (I tell this tale about my most sad self), the opening line of *The Wife's Lament*, closely resembling *The Seafarer* 1–3 and *Resignation* 96b–97a. In the Norse *First Lay of Guthrun* other women, trying unsuccessfully to console, relate their own woes in a series of incantations designed to release the healing flow of Guthrun's frozen tears for her slain husband Sigurd.²⁸ Close to the end of the Middle Ages, Christine de Pizan's poem of her widowhood *Seulete sui* (Alone I am)²⁹ is also suggestive of ritual in its anaphoric catalogue of unhappiness, constantly repeating the opening words as Christine both honours and exorcises her grief.³⁰

In the context of worship and prayer, hymns and meditations on the Crucifixion, like their ritual counterparts from the ancient Middle East, lament the dying god. Some of the most moving Christian laments are associated with the Virgin Mary, who stood at the foot of the cross while her Son died. The theme appears, in more meditative and less ritualistic form, in prose as well as verse.³¹ Marian poems, with their affective piety, can be placed within the tradition of ritual lament in which personal and private grief coalesces with cultic and communal mourning. *In a*

²⁸ *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta* is one of the poems in the Elder or Poetic Edda. Text in *Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by Gustav Neckel, rev. by H. Kuhn, 5th edn, 2 vols (Heidelberg: Winter, 1983). Translated in *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by Caroline Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Text in *Christine de Pizan's Ballads, Rondeaux, and Virelais: An Anthology*, ed. by Kenneth Varty (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1965). Translated in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. and trans. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, with Kevin Brownlee, Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 1997).

³⁰ On Christine's laments, which are many and various, see Nadia Margolis, 'Christine de Pizan's Life in Lament: Love, Death, and Politics', this volume.

³¹ On Mary's lamentation for her son, Jesus, see Anna Czarnowus, 'Mary, Motherhood, and Theatricality in the Old Polish "Listen, Dear Brothers" and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*', Elizabeth Towl, '"Son, dey þou nat without þy modyre": The Landscape of Suffering in *The Lamentacioun of Oure Lady*', and Amy Vines, 'Lullaby as Lament: Learning to Mourn in Middle English Nativity Lyrics', in this volume. On affective piety in the *planctus Mariae*, as contrasted with a more abstract treatment in the almost exclusively Latin *planctus Rachelis*, see Susan Boynton, 'From the Lament of Rachel to the Lament of Mary: A Transformation in the History of Drama and Spirituality', in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. by Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicholas Bell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 319–40.

tabernacle of a tour,³² noteworthy for its refrain ‘quia amore languo’ (because I am languishing with love), evokes a tenderly pleading Mary speaking to the sinful human soul. This devout poem is a far cry from Bion’s voyeuristic *Adonis*, but both poems offer (as a literary exercise in Bion’s case) an invitation to active devotion through empathy with a grieving female figure. And, of course, the refrain of *In a tabernacle* is taken from words in the Song of Songs (2. 5 and 5. 8) expressing the Bride’s longing for her Beloved; the Song itself is rooted in Hebrew ritual, although epithalamic, not funerary.³³

The formal gestures and appurtenances of lament are more prominent in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries than in northern Europe.³⁴ Self-wounding, self-neglect, and dark, rough clothing approximate the mourner to the damaged, decaying body in the darkness of earth;³⁵ they can also symbolize the lamenter’s own sense of worthlessness. External, physical pain replaces and thus assuages the hurt within. Breast-beating becomes synonymous with mourning and weeping, as reflected in the evolution of *plangere* and *planctus* (‘to beat’ and ‘beating’) into ‘to weep’ and ‘plaint’. In the Christian society of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, extreme self-affliction is more likely to be penitential than funerary, but the penitent’s mortification of the flesh is essentially a type of mourning.³⁶ Well documented in Greece from the earliest records down to modern times,³⁷ the

³² *Index*, no. 1460. Text in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, 2nd edn, rev. by G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), no. 132.

³³ On the use of the Song of Songs by medieval writers, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

³⁴ On Norse funeral customs, see Harris, “Myth to Live By” in *Sonatorrek*, this volume.

³⁵ Cf. Katharine Goodland, who focuses especially on women’s lamentation. She comments, ‘The lamenting women participate in the state of the dead’, and adds, ‘Their performance articulates social disorder and physical decay as a precondition for social regeneration and renewal’. See “‘Us for to wepe no man may lett’: Resistant Female Grief in the Medieval English Lazarus Plays”, in *The Representation of Women’s Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 90–118 (p. 92).

³⁶ On the subject of penitential mortification of the flesh, see Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. by Tania Croft-Murray and Helen Elsom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 43. In the late medieval morality play *Everyman*, the title character performs penance by scourging himself, which lightens his heart, and puts on a garment of contrition, wet with his tears; *Everyman*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1961), lines 574–75, 627–28, 638–39, 643–45.

³⁷ See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

conventions of funeral practice become a literary tradition, as they are borrowed by poets displaying their classical learning.³⁸ Alongside the symbols of death and destruction are those of life in all its freshness. Flowers embody the fairness of the dead, as well as the possibility of renewal, being reborn from the earth. The flower that blooms and dies, the sapling that is felled: both are ready symbols for untimely death.³⁹ The fallen blood of Adonis becomes luxuriant roses (*Adonis* 66); the youthful Milton's chosen symbol for a fair infant dying of a cough is the pale primrose.⁴⁰ In a better-known poem, the pastoral elegy *Lycidas* composed in memory of Edward King, Milton draws heavily on Hellenistic and Roman models as he depicts flowers in mourning for the dead shepherd poet (*Lycidas* 142–50) and the countryside itself lamenting (*Lycidas* 38–49).⁴¹ Like its successors in the tradition of the English pastoral elegy, Shelley's *Adonais* (for Keats) and Arnold's *Thyrsis* (for Hallam),⁴² *Lycidas* combines a highly artful classical mode with a very real personal sorrow. The role of 'uncouth swain' may be disingenuous, but the exploration of mourning in order finally to leave it behind and turn 'to fresh woods and pastures new' rings true for the learned author as well as his faux-rustic persona.

Variouly, in these very diverse laments, the personal and the cultic are intertwined, the one bringing myth and ritual to life, the other elevating the private and incidental to the universal and archetypal. Thus grief is sublimated, but suffering still remains. Ultimately, the bereaved mourn not for the dead but for their own

³⁸ On male elegy's function as a presentation of literary credentials and an assertion of one's place in a literary tradition, see Celeste Schenk, 'Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-constructing the Elegy', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5 (1986), 13–27 (p. 13), and Patricia Clare Ingham, 'From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender, and Anglo-Saxon Community', in *Grief and Gender, 700–1700*, ed. by Jennifer C. Vaught, with Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 17–31 (p. 18).

³⁹ See Casey Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), pp. 64–70; and Spargo, *Ethics of Mourning*, pp. 225–26, on 'mock-pastoral sensibility'.

⁴⁰ See the opening of 'On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough', in *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 405–08.

⁴¹ In *Poetical Works of Milton*, ed. by Darbishire, pp. 447–52.

⁴² See *Shelley's Adonais: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Anthony D. Kerr (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), and *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 262–69. Schenk regards the pastoral elegy as 'a resolutely patriarchal genre', which women authors react against, in poems that emphasize continuity and connection, rather than competition and succession ('Feminism and Deconstruction', pp. 13 and 16–17).

forlorn state.⁴³ Hreðel, in *Beowulf*, dies of grief because he is powerless to avenge his son, killed by another son. Sonless fathers lament their own failure as their line fails, like the nameless man (to whom Hreðel is compared) whose son hangs on the gallows (*Beowulf* 2444–62a),⁴⁴ like Beowulf himself who has never had a son (lines 2729–32a, 2813–16),⁴⁵ like Egill Skallagrímsson, who lost his two sons by drowning and sickness (*Sonatorrek*, st. 4).⁴⁶ Widows lament their husbands, but what hurts most of all is their own loss of status. ‘καὶ νῦν ὄλωλας μὲν σύ, ναυσθλοῦμαι δ’ ἐγὼ | πρὸς Ἑλλάδα’ αἰχμάλωτος ἐς δοῦλον ζυγόν’ (And now you are gone, and I must sail | to Greece, a captive, to the yoke of slavery), cries Euripides’ Andromache to the dead Hector in the *Trojan Women* (lines 677–78).⁴⁷ Herborg, in the *First Lay of Guthrun*, has suffered the same fate; she was compelled to ‘skreyta ok skúa binda | hersis kván’ (dress the chieftain’s wife and tie her shoes) (st. 9). Guthrun herself, though not a slave, feels a similar humiliation; while Sigurd lived she was looked up to, but now she is ‘svá litil sem lauf sé | opt í jölstrom’ (as little as a leaf on a laurel tree) (st. 19).

In many cultures the rituals of lament have been performed especially by women, displays of violent emotion being regarded as, within limits, appropriate for the weaker, but not for the stronger, sex. For other reasons too this role is socially consistent. Women were, and usually still are, the nurturers, assigned the care of the body. Again, women’s lives have been more restricted, so theirs is often the voice of protest. Men as well as women perform the self-negating actions of mourning. Like David and his men mourning for Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1. 11–27), like the afflicted Job and his friends (Job 2. 12–13; 16. 15–16),⁴⁸ they

⁴³ This egocentricism can be found even in the Virgin lamenting for Christ; see Towl, “Son, dey þou nat without þy modyre”, this volume.

⁴⁴ Citations from *Beowulf* refer to the edition of Fr. Klaeber (Boston: Heath, 1950).

⁴⁵ On lament and violence in *Beowulf*, see Savage, “The Grave, the Sword, and the Lament”, this volume.

⁴⁶ Citations from *Sonatorrek* refer to *Scaldic Poetry*, ed. by Thorlac Turville-Petre (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). On this poem, see Harris, “Myth to Live By” in *Sonatorrek*, and Russell Poole, “Non enim possum plorare nec lamenta fundere”: *Sonatorrek* in a Tenth-Century Context *tíl minningar um Stefán Karlsson*, this volume.

⁴⁷ See vol. IV (1999) of *Euripides*, ed. and trans. by David Kovacs, Loeb, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994–2002), my translation.

⁴⁸ In the context of Old Testament mourning, see Toswell, ‘Structures of Sorrow’, this volume, on the structure of lament in the medieval Psalter (traditionally attributed to David), and its echoes in Old and Middle English.

rend their garments, weep and fast, sully their hair with dust and ashes. But the most extreme actions of lament, wailing and self-defacement by cutting off the hair and lacerating the cheeks, are performed by women in particular.⁴⁹ Plutarch commends the Athenian statesman Solon for enacting legislation to curb female excess at funerals (*Solon* 21.5–7).⁵⁰ The poet Archilochus urges his friends to bear up, ‘γυναικεῖον πένθος ἀπὸσάμενοι’ (thrusting aside womanish mourning) (Frag. 13 West).⁵¹ The wildness of female lament is extreme in Aeschylus’s Cassandra, who laments the horrendous sins of Agamemnon’s house as well as her own imminent death in an extraordinary series of passages, both incoherent and visionary (*Agamemnon* 1072–1177; the passage is a sung exchange with the chorus).⁵² The mourning of Electra is similarly extreme, in Aeschylus’s *Choephoroi* as well as in the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides.⁵³ In ancient Greece, as in medieval England, unrestrained lamentation by women, meeting a deeply felt psychological need, persists in drama even while proscribed by authority.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ On women’s lament rituals in the ancient world, see Batya Weinbaum, ‘Lament Ritual Transformed into Literature: Positing Women’s Prayer as Cornerstone in Western Classical Literature’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 114 (2001), 20–39. Weinbaum notes that ‘women frequently take the leadership in creating and singing songs for ceremonial occasions associated with crucial stages in the life cycle, such as funeral laments and wedding songs’ (p. 25), referring to Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 198–200.

⁵⁰ See vol. I (1914) of *Plutarch’s Lives*, ed. and trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb, 11 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914–50).

⁵¹ Interestingly, the heroic world seems not to have shared the prohibition on male tears — although it is still women who express the most extreme mourning. Priam and Achilles weep and moan together for their losses in *Iliad* 24. 507–12.

⁵² See vol. II of *Aeschylus*, ed. and trans. by Herbert Weir Smyth, Loeb, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

⁵³ See *Sophocles*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994–96); *Euripides*, ed. and trans. by Kovacs, III.

⁵⁴ Goodland examines a persisting tradition of female lament which is pre-Christian and even anti-Christian in its disregard for the hope and consolation of eternal life; see “Us for to wepe may no man lett”, pp. 90–91, 93. She notes condemnation of excessive lamentation by both Church Fathers and Protestant clergymen. Thus, Basil commends Christ’s response to Lazarus’s death: ‘He wept, He did not lament, or wail, or moan, or rend His garments or tear His hair’, *ibid.*, p. 94, quoting the translation in Mary B. Cunningham, ‘Basil of Seleucia’s Homily on Lazarus: A New Edition (BHG 2225)’, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 104 (1986), 161–84 (p. 180). Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury in Elizabeth I’s reign, also condemns extravagant mourning and ‘womannish wayling’. See Goodland, “Us for to wepe no man may lett”, p. 92; also Pigman, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*, p. 30.

In Ireland, keening — the word is derived from the Irish *caoineadh* ‘lament’ — at wakes and funerals persisted into modern times. Patricia Lysaght describes a longstanding tradition of ‘immoderate expressions of grief, by women especially, often paid mourners, a custom which the Church objected to over the centuries: ‘In its most developed form in Ireland, the traditional lament or keen was a long extempore poem of eulogy and sorrow composed in [the ancient] *Rosc* metre’; at the close of each stanza by the main singer there would be a choral cry. Lysaght examines especially the ‘Lament for Art O’Leary’, composed and performed, in Irish, in 1773 by the young man’s wife Eileen when she found him shot. As described in her poem, her expressions of grief and rage, including drinking his blood, were certainly ‘immoderate’.⁵⁵

A contrast between male and female mourning roles is observable in *Beowulf* too, the most intense lamentation being assigned to women. The hero admonishes Hrothgar, who has just lost his best friend, ‘Do not grieve, wise man; it is better for every man that he avenge his friend than that he mourn greatly’ (lines 1384–85).⁵⁶ This in response to a murder committed by Grendel’s *mother*, more monster than woman, who undertook this action in accordance with the male ethic of vengeance.⁵⁷ In fact, the poet momentarily forgets her sex and designates her by a masculine pronoun, in lines 1392 and 1394, referring to the grammatically masculine ‘Grendles magan’ (Grendel’s kins[wo]man). At Beowulf’s own funeral a woman laments her loss and coming defenceless humiliation, but the men’s contribution, chanted as they ride around his tomb, is mainly a dignified eulogy. Their tribute is similar to that performed at the funeral of Attila.⁵⁸ In the Finnsburh

⁵⁵ See Patricia Lysaght, ‘Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp: The Lament for the Dead in Ireland’, *Folklore*, 108 (1997), 65–82 (pp. 66–67 and 71). On Eileen’s lament for Art, see also Angela Bourke, ‘Performing, Not Writing: The Reception of an Irish Woman’s Lament’, in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, ed. by Yopie Prins and Maera Schreiber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 132–46.

⁵⁶ Hrothgar weeps on parting from *Beowulf*, a display of emotion explicitly linked with the sensibility of old age: ‘hruron him tearas, | blondenfeaxum’ (lines 1872b–73a; literally, ‘tears fell for him, | the gray-haired one’).

⁵⁷ On Grendel’s mother, see the papers by Ramsey, ‘*Dustsceawung*’, and Savage, ‘The Grave, the Sword, and the Lament’, this volume. As Jennifer Vaught notes, in the introduction to her collection of essays on the gendering of mourning, bloody violence has been widely regarded as the appropriate vehicle for male grief (*Grief and Gender*, pp. 8–14).

⁵⁸ See *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 268, quoting Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* (Concerning the Origin and Deeds of the Goths) (551 CE), chap. 49. The corpse is laid out in the open under a silk canopy, and specially chosen horsemen, selected from the whole Hunnish nation, ride round in a circle, proclaiming the glories of Attila in a solemn funeral chant.

Episode, Hildeburh ‘gnornode, | geomrode giddum’ (mourned, lamented in songs) (lines 1117b–18a). Her lament may be impassioned, but it consists of narratives (*giedd* also means a story) rather than merely of wordless or incoherent wailing. The phrase suggests something like *The Wife’s Lament*. Interestingly, the *Beowulf* poet chooses not to quote the laments of women (for reasons of decorum?), only the relatively restrained and reflective ones uttered by men, like the Last Survivor (lines 2247–66), and Beowulf himself in his final speeches (lines 2729–51, 2794–2808, 2813–16).

Closely related to lament and sometimes inseparable from it, the woman’s complaint usually expresses unsatisfied or lost love. As John Kerrigan explains, ‘for long-sustained and socially ingrained reasons, “female”-voiced poems that woo are rare, though common for masculine personae, while abandonment leaves (fictive and actual) women in a more grievously trapped circumstance than is true of their masculine equivalents’.⁵⁹ In the nineteenth century, writers of a romantic persuasion from Goethe and Jakob Grimm to Alfred Jeanroy and Gaston Paris traced the whole of medieval lyric back to love songs, usually sad, composed spontaneously by their female performers.⁶⁰ An implausible theory. Still, it is probable that some of the motifs of women’s love complaints are oral and popular. For example, the use of the freedom-loving hawk or falcon to symbolize the roving lover who loves women and leaves them occurs in medieval poems from Germany and Italy as well as in a nineteenth-century Polish Opera:⁶¹ Der von Kürenberg’s *Ich zôch mir einen*

⁵⁹ *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and ‘Female Complaint’*. *A Critical Anthology*, ed. by John Kerrigan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 8.

⁶⁰ See my ‘Introduction’, in *Medieval Woman’s Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 1–14 (p. 3), and pp. 205–06, nn. 10–12. For Goethe’s and Grimm’s reactions to Serbian women’s songs, in which they saw traces of the ‘älteste Volkspoesie’, see Ulrich Mölk’s ‘Introduction’ in his edition, *Romanische Frauenlieder* (Munich: Fink, 1989), p. 20. For Jeanroy, see his *Origines de la poésie lyrique en France au Moyen Âge*, 3rd edn (Paris: Champion, 1925), pp. 158, 445. For Paris, see his review of Jeanroy’s book, in *Journal des Savants* (1891), 674–88 and 729–42, and (1892), 155–67 and 407–30; repr. in G. Paris, *Mélanges de littérature française du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1912), pp. 539–615 (p. 611).

⁶¹ The male lover as a bird of prey is a very widespread folk motif. It also appears in Spain and Portugal. Samuel G. Armistead cites a (possible) example in eleventh-century Hispano-Arabic poetry, as well as in later medieval and Renaissance lyrics, and in the novel *La Celestina* from the beginning of the Spanish Golden Age. See ‘*Kharjas* and *Villancicos*’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 34 (2003), 3–19 (pp. 14–15). In an English lyric from the early sixteenth century, the Corpus Christi carol, with its burden ‘Lully, lullely, lully, lullely, | The fawcon hath born my make away’, the

valken (I trained me a falcon) and Dietmar von Aist's *Ez stuont ein vrouwe alleine* (There stood a lady alone);⁶² the anonymous *Tapina in me, c'amava uno sparvero* (Alas for me! I loved a hawk);⁶³ the folklore-derived opera *Halka*, in which a young woman refers to her departed seducer as 'Johnny my falcon'.⁶⁴

If oral tradition contributes a substantial strain to poetry in this mode, literary precedent provides another. Ovid's *Heroides*, verse epistles in which various legendary women complain to the men who have deserted them, is one obvious source to consider;⁶⁵ another is Virgil's Dido lamenting and cursing Aeneas (*Aeneid* 4.305–30 and 365–87).⁶⁶ The influence of the *Heroides* has been rather speculatively proposed for the love poetry of the Provençal woman troubadour the Comtessa de Dia.⁶⁷ I myself have pointed out a resemblance, not necessarily the result of direct borrowing, between *Heroides* 11, the Letter of Canace to Macareus, and the Old English *Wulf and Eadwacer*, both laments of forlorn women whose stories mention a tyrannical guardian-figure, an illicit love, and an infant carried off to be torn apart by wild beasts, although the legend of Canace involves incest.⁶⁸ The Dido story, as told in *Aeneid* 4 and *Heroides* 7, figures in some of the *Carmina Burana*.⁶⁹

bird carries the lover, who seems to be associated with Christ, into an 'orchard brown'. See *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. by R. T. Davies (London: Faber, 1963), p. 272 (text) and pp. 363–64 (notes).

⁶² The von Kürenberg and the Dietmar poem are, respectively, nos 8. 33 and 37. 4 in the classic edition of medieval German lyrics, *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. by Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, 38th edn, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1977–88): I [texts] (1988); II [commentary] (1977); III. 1 [commentary from C. von Kraus's edn] (1939, repr. 1981); III. 2 [notes from previous edns] (1950, repr. 1981).

⁶³ For the Italian text, see *Le rime della Scuola Siciliana*, ed. by Bruno Panvini, 2 vols (Florence: Olschki, 1962–64), Section XLV, no. 7a. The lover replies reassuringly in 7b.

⁶⁴ For the hawk motif in *Halka* I am indebted to Michael Falk in a private communication. He notes that the lover is referred to as 'my hawk' in modern Polish folk songs.

⁶⁵ See *Ovid: Heroides and Amores*, ed. and trans. by Grant Showerman, Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935).

⁶⁶ See *Virgil*, ed. and trans. by H. R. Fairclough, rev. edn, Loeb, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935).

⁶⁷ By Martín de Riquer, *Los trovadores: Historia literaria y textos*, 3 vols (Barcelona: Planeta, 1975), II, 80; and Merritt Blakeslee, 'La Chanson de femme, les *Heroides*, et la canso occitane à voix de femme: Considérations sur l'originalité des trobairitz', in *Hommage à Jean-Charles Payen* (Caen: Université de Caen, 1989), pp. 67–75 (p. 74).

⁶⁸ *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 238.

⁶⁹ Nos 98, 99, 99b, and especially 100, a *planctus* representing Dido's final words before committing suicide. Text in *Carmina Burana 1.2: Die Liebeslieder*, ed. by Alfons Hilka and Otto

Both versions lie behind the figure of Dido in *The House of Fame* and *The Legend of Good Women* by Chaucer, who explicitly acknowledges his debt to Virgil and Ovid (*Fame* 378–79; *Legend* 924–29, 1366–67).⁷⁰

The love complaint branches into various related genres of laments by unfortunate women. Disillusioned bitterness characterizes the lament of the pregnant girl. Seduced and abandoned, she bewails her lot, as in the Latin *Huc usque me miseram* (Until now, poor wretched me) (*Carmina Burana* 126), the macaronic *Ich was ein chint so wolgetan* (I was such a lovely girl) (*Carmina Burana* 185), the Middle English *Alas, alas the wyle, Kyrie, so kyrie*,⁷¹ and other lyrics featuring the ‘Jolly Jankin’ type of irresistible clerk.⁷² The use of Latin in some of these poems, the prominence of lady-killing clerks, and a certain cynical humour to varying degrees combined with the inherent pathos of the scenario, suggest a male clerical authorship, and possibly audience. Similar in tone is the lament of the lusty young nun, cloistered against her will, as in the twelfth-century *Plangit nonna fletibus* (A nun is crying),⁷³ and the late medieval Castilian *Agora que soy niña* (Now while I’m young).⁷⁴ The *chanson de malmariée*, attested mainly in Northern France, features a pretty young wife complaining about her boorish, brutal, and very likely impotent old husband.⁷⁵ In these poems, the speaker tends to be less mournful than defiant, flaunting her handsome and virile lover, as in Adam de la Halle’s *rondeau Fi, maris, de vostre amour | car j’ai ami* (Fie, husband, on your love, for I’ve a

Schumann (Heidelberg: Winter, 1941). The translation intended to accompany this edition is *Love Songs of the Carmina Burana*, trans. by E. D. Blodgett and R. A. Swanson (New York: Garland, 1987).

⁷⁰ Text in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, pp. 348–73 (*Fame*) and 588–630 (*Legend*).

⁷¹ *Index*, nos 377 and 1849. Texts in *The Early English Carols*, ed. by R. L. Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), nos 453 and 457.

⁷² ‘Jolly Jankin’ is so called in the first stanza of *Kyrie, so kyrie*.

⁷³ Text and translation in Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 357–60.

⁷⁴ Text in *Nuevo corpus de la antigua lírica popular hispánica (siglos XV a XVII)*, ed. by Margit Frenk (Mexico City: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003).

⁷⁵ On this genre, see Wendy Pfeffer, ‘Introduction to Poetry: Genres and Forms’, and Eglal Doss-Quinby’s introductory remarks on Poem 31 in *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, ed. by Eglal Doss-Quinby and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 33–44 (pp. 41–42) and 151 respectively.

lover!).⁷⁶ *Por coi me bait mes maris, | laissette* (Why does my husband beat poor wretched me)⁷⁷ presents a speaker who will lie naked with her lover as an act of revenge ('m'an vangerai', st. 3). Thus, the genre brings us to the boundaries of lament, and beyond them into mockery and retaliation.

As I remarked at the beginning of this survey, mourning can transform itself into rage. That is the direction often taken in Norse poetry and saga. At the end of the *First Lay of Guthrun*, the jealous Brynhild looks fire and breathes venom when she sees the wounds on Sigurd (st. 27). In the following prose, we are told that she put her slaves to death before taking her own life. Other poems in the *Poetic Edda* relate how Guthrun subsequently married Atli (Attila), who enticed her brothers to his court and killed them. Guthrun punished Atli by serving him the bodies of their two sons, before killing him and burning his hall to the ground, herself perishing in it.⁷⁸ The horrendous act of *teknophagia*, 'eating one's children', is also committed by Thyestes, in Greek myth, tricked by his brother Atreus.⁷⁹ This ultimate unnatural sin figures too in the bloody Roman story of Titus Andronicus, taken up by Shakespeare in his play.⁸⁰ The 'black wrath' of mourning that prompts such terrible revenge, along with the corresponding need for amnesty, 'forgetting', is explored in a Greek context by Nicole Loraux,⁸¹ who calls to mind the *mēnis* 'wrath' of Achilles mourning Patroclus's death and slaying countless Trojans to requite it (in books 20 and 21 of the *Iliad*), as well as the *mēnis* of other mythological figures, including Clytemnestra and Medea. These two are 'mothers in mourning' who become murderous mothers, striking out at a treacherous husband with terrible violence, the one hacking Agamemnon to death for killing their daughter, the other punishing Jason for taking a new bride by putting their sons to the sword.⁸²

⁷⁶ See Robert White Linker, *A Bibliography of Old French Lyrics*, Romance Monographs, 31 (University: University of Mississippi, 1979), no. 45. Text in *Rondeaux et refrains: Du XII^e siècle au début du XIV^e*, ed. by Nico H. J. van den Boogaard (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969), p. 53.

⁷⁷ Linker, *Bibliography of Old French Lyrics*, no. 265.1346. Text and translation in *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, ed. by Doss-Quinby and others, pp. 153–54.

⁷⁸ See especially the *Lay of Atli* (*Atlakviða*). For Guthrun in the *Edda*, the *Volsunga Saga*, and the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* (where she appears as Kriemhild), see the 'Introduction' to *Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by Larrington, pp. xviii–xx.

⁷⁹ The horrible banquet is graphically described by Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1591–1602.

⁸⁰ See *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, 3rd ser. (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁸¹ Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, pp. 43–56 and 83–109.

⁸² Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, pp. 49–51. For Clytemnestra's view of her action as justifiable revenge, see *Agamemnon*, 1523–29. For Medea's wrath that overpowers even motherly love, see *Medea* 1069–80 in *Euripides*, ed. by Kovacs, I.

In the course of illustrating different kinds of lament, I have touched here and there upon the special interest of this volume: mourning for dead children. Apart from the Marian laments, which form a special case, I can think of few medieval examples, although the topic is referred to often enough,⁸³ and later English examples of poems expressing the loss to the poet of a beloved young child come to mind — notably Ben Jonson's poem for his son Benjamin, 'Farewell, thou child of my right hand',⁸⁴ and Wordsworth's sonnet for his daughter Catherine, 'Surprised by joy'.⁸⁵ Both these poems are really more about the poets themselves than about their children, who remain unnamed and uncharacterized.⁸⁶ As far as I know, there are no formulas specific to this theme, beyond repeating the name and 'my child' like a ritual cry, a natural enough phenomenon in all periods. David laments for his slain rebel son in words that became famous in the King James translation: 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' (II Samuel 18. 33). In Flannery O'Connor's grim story 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', the grandmother desperately calls for her murdered son, "'Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" as if her heart would break'.⁸⁷ Emotional evocation of the name and the relationship is, obviously, not peculiar to parental lament. In *Quant vient en mai, que l'on dit as lons jors* (When it befalls in May, called the time of long days), a well-known Old French *chanson de toile* — the genre is attributed to women singing at their embroidery — Bele Erembors exclaims mournfully, and finally joyfully, to her neglectful lover, in the poem's refrain, 'E Raynaut, amis' (Oh, Raynaut, my love!).⁸⁸ But the loss of a child is the most painful loss; it overthrows the natural order of things and strikes at the special protectiveness of a parent.

⁸³ For mourning parents in late Middle English texts, see Rebecca Krug, 'Natural Feeling and Unnatural Mothers: *Herod the Great*, The Life of Saint Bridget, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*', this volume. Krug considers especially the Wakefield *Herod the Great* (*Slaughter of the Innocents*), the Life of St Bridget, and Chaucer's *Griselde*, but also notes the *Pearl* narrator, the 'little clergeon's' mother in the *Prioress's Tale*, and Sophie's father in the *Tale of Melibee*.

⁸⁴ *Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed. by Ian Donaldson (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁸⁵ *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

⁸⁶ Benjamin's name, which in Hebrew means 'child of the right hand', is implied in the opening line.

⁸⁷ Flannery O'Connor, *'A Good Man is Hard to Find' and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 28.

⁸⁸ Linker, *Bibliography of Old French Lyrics*, no. 265.1485. Text in *Les Chansons de toile*, ed. by Michel Zink (Paris: Champion, 1977), pp. 93–94.

Fathers see themselves being perpetuated in their sons; mothers feel a physical bond with the children they have carried and suckled.⁸⁹

This is why Marian laments are so poignant; the grief of the Mother losing her Son is more touching than direct contemplation of the crucified Christ. Among the many Marian poems, I have already mentioned *In a tabernacle of a tour*. Another, very brief, poem in the genre holds back from voicing lament, but vividly suggests the grieving figure, the sun setting beneath trees evoking the Son dying on the Tree: 'Now goth sonne under wod, | me reweth, Marie, thi faire rode, | now goth sonne under tre, | me reweth, Marie, thi sone and thee.'⁹⁰ Sometimes lullaby foreshadows death lament, as in a fourteenth-century carol with the burden 'Lullay, lullay, la, lullay', where Mary speaks in dialogue with her Son.⁹¹ Rather similar is the Coventry Carol, sung by the women whose infant children are being slaughtered in the Massacre of the Holy Innocents.⁹² In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, Griselde lulls her infant daughter and bids her farewell before letting her be taken away to be slain, as Griselde thinks (lines 551–60) — a strange mixture of natural and unnatural feeling.⁹³

⁸⁹ Patricia Phillippy sees immoderate maternal mourning in the early modern period as a constructed voice that exposes cultural demands and represents 'one of the strategies available to women to express a female subjectivity'; see "I might againe have been the Sepulchre": Paternal and Maternal Mourning in Early Modern England', in *Grief and Gender*, ed. by Vaught, with Bruckner, pp. 197–214 (p. 214).

⁹⁰ *Index*, no. 2320. Text in *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, no. 1; I have lightly modernized. The word *rode*, here 'face', also suggests the meaning 'cross' or 'rood'. This poem or passage is quoted in St Edmund's *Speculum Ecclesiae*. See Davies's notes in his *Medieval English Lyrics*, pp. 310–11.

⁹¹ *Index*, no. 352. Text in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Brown and Smithers, no. 56. All surviving Middle English Nativity lyrics include references to the Crucifixion. See Vines, 'Lullaby as Lament', this volume.

⁹² This late medieval poem comes from the Pageant of the Massacre of the Innocents in the Coventry cycle of mystery plays. No. 112 in *Early English Carols*, ed. by Greene. On the treatment of this episode in the dramas, see Jane Tolmie, 'Spinning Women and Manly Soldiers: Grief and Game in the English Massacre Plays', this volume.

⁹³ *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, pp. 138–53. On the problems of interpreting Griselde's acquiescence in the murder of her children, see Krug, 'Natural Feeling and Unnatural Mothers', and Czarnowus, 'Mary, Motherhood, and Theatricality', this volume. See also M. C. Bodden, 'Disordered Grief and Fashionable Afflictions in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale*', in *Grief and Gender*, ed. by Vaught, with Bruckner, pp. 51–63.

Griselde in her acquiescence to the murder of her children has something in common with mothers of Greek myth who actively kill them to get back at their husbands in the cruelest way, thus perverting their own nurturing role and violating the most sacred taboos. Whereas, possibly, Griselde's Walter acts like an inscrutable God, these mythical husbands are, quite simply, a bad lot. Procne kills their son Itys to punish her husband, who has violated her sister. The tale was transmitted to the Middle Ages via Ovid's version in the *Metamorphoses* (6.424–674).⁹⁴ Euripides' Medea takes a similar revenge on Jason. Nevertheless, they, like the passive Griselde, love their children tenderly. The physical presence of her little ones is piercingly felt by Medea as she steels herself to sacrifice them: 'ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή, | ὦ μαλθακὸς χρῶς πνεῦμα θ' ἥδιστον τέκνων' (Oh sweet touch, oh soft skin and fragrant breath of children) (*Medea* 1074–75). I can think of no medieval mourning mother as disturbing as this. Perhaps a similar scenario is hinted at in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, where the speaker exclaims bitterly that a wolf is carrying off 'uncerne earmne hwelp' (our wretched whelp) to the forest (or 'our cowardly whelp' if one understands MS *earne* as *eargne* rather than *earmne*).⁹⁵

One wonders why the lament of the mourning mother for her child seems not to assume the distinctive forms or formulas of a genre⁹⁶ — except in the specific case of Mary. Other topoi of mourning can be very conventional: the *ubi sunt* questions mentioned above; the ruined hall, featured in early Welsh laments in the cycles of Llywarch Hen (Llywarch the Old) and Heledd⁹⁷ as well as in Old English

⁹⁴ See *Metamorphoses*, vols I and II of *Ovid*, ed. and trans. by Frank Justus Miller, Loeb, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), and Charles Martindale, *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On Chrétien de Troyes's treatment of the Procne story, see Susan Small, 'The Language of Philomena's Lament', this volume. Small focuses on the linguistic possibilities of the cry *oci* uttered by the nightingale, the bird into which Procne's sister Philomena was transformed.

⁹⁵ See *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 176.

⁹⁶ But see Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions', this volume, on medieval Latin laments for dead children.

⁹⁷ See *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion*, ed. and trans. by Jenny Rowland (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990). Llywarch has lost all his twenty-four sons in battle. He is sometimes identified with the nameless speaker who describes the ruined hall of Urien Prince of Rheged, in *Yr Aelwyd Hon* ('This Hearth'). In *Stafell Gynddylyan* ('The Hall of Cynddylan'), Heledd, sister of Cynddylan Prince of Powys, bewails the destruction of his hall and her own desolation. On the similarities between this Welsh poetry and the OE elegies, see *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, pp. 239–41.

poetry; the formulaic 'exile theme', also common in Old English poetry;⁹⁸ the various *plactus* of unhappy women.⁹⁹ Is it because unless tied to larger themes of guilt and innocence this subject has no moral lessons to teach; because, unlike so many other genres of female lament, it cannot be ironized;¹⁰⁰ or because it is simply too painful? The parent, especially the mother, grieving for a lost child, is the most pathetic of mourning figures.

All lamenters go down into the depths. At one extreme the mourner simply makes an end, like Hreðel in *Beowulf*; at the other, he, or she, uses lament and mourning to complete grief and move on, like Milton's shepherd-singer in *Lycidas*. Thus literary lament can accomplish the same movement and the same therapy effected by the formal rituals performed over those who have passed away. Even when consolation is excluded, the song of sorrow creates its own harmony, out of disorder and disintegration building and contemplating a new reintegration and order.

⁹⁸ These formulas are itemized and analysed by Stanley B. Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum*, 30 (1955), 200–06.

⁹⁹ For example, the complaints of the ill-married wife, the reluctant nun, the abandoned pregnant girl, and, of course, the widow.

¹⁰⁰ Occasionally the mother's suffering is deflected. Some of the Massacre of the Innocents plays choose to shift focus from sympathy with the grieving mothers to a slapstick and bawdy depiction of their knock-about with Herod's soldiers. See Tolmie, 'Spinning Women and Manly Soldiers', this volume.

STRUCTURES OF SORROW: THE LAMENT PSALMS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

M. J. Toswell

The language of lament is the language of the Psalms. The structure of lament is the structure of the lament psalms. Certainly these ancient texts reflect psychological and emotional truths in the ways in which grief and anger and anxiety play out in the direction of consolation and resolution and, although they cannot be claimed as the very earliest such expressions or as the most psychologically apt, they are nonetheless the most pervasive and in some respects the most meaningful for the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The Psalms provide both the earliest and the most common, most recognizable language and structure of lament available to the Christian medieval mind.¹ Thus when medieval writers and thinkers turned to the expression of grief and sorrow, the habitual language of that grief and sorrow already in their own minds and souls was the language of the lament psalms, and the syntax and structure embedded in their hearts and thoughts was the syntax and structure of the lament psalms.² Moreover, the Psalms partake

¹ Most useful for my purposes here, among the vast array of analyses of the Psalms and their place in the Bible and in literature, are Susan E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). The more traditional commentaries include W. E. Barnes, *The Psalms, with Introduction and Notes*, Westminster Commentaries, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1931); John William Rogerson and John William McKay's studies *Psalms 1–50*, *Psalms 51–100*, and *Psalms 101–150*, each published in the series Cambridge Bible Commentaries on the Old Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and, older but still very useful, J. M. Neale and R. F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms: From Primitive and Mediaeval Writers*, 4 vols (London: Masters, 1860–74).

² The urge to turn to the Psalms for advice and comfort may not be as prevalent now as it was in the early Middle Ages, but it remains a significant factor in modern spirituality. See, for example,

of a double interpretation that was profoundly comforting and familiar to the medieval mind: they were generally perceived to be the work of David, the great Jewish king of Israel and ancestor of Jesus Christ according to the Tree of Jesse, the genealogy of Christ's Hebrew forerunners. They were thus forerunners of Christ, but also expressions both of David and of Christ; allegorically the Psalms blended in their very language and expression the Old Testament with the New, the prophecy with its fulfilment, the Davidic question with its Christian answer.

The Psalms thus embodied the sacramental grace and soteriological history at the core of Christianity. They reflected the cry of the individual bereft of all happiness and abandoned by God, and the joining of that individual into the tranquil and safe haven which is Christianity. The Psalms provided a locus in which grief and misery, in particular, could safely be expressed without fear of divine reprisal, because they were the voice with which Christ spoke to God in the New Testament and the voice of King David in the Old. Within the text that gradually over a period of centuries became settled as the Hebrew psalter, three main groups of psalms developed: hymns, laments, and thanksgivings.³ A fourth category includes some miscellaneous kinds of psalms, including creation hymns, the servant songs, the kingship or royal psalms, the liturgies with their antiphonal features, the prophetic exhortations with didactic or oracular elements, and the didactic psalms. Of course, the division of the Psalms into categories is only a very general set of distinctions: elements of didacticism, prophecy, thanksgiving, and lament, in particular, can be found in any of the Psalms. The basic principles of Christian exegesis of the Psalms remain that the Psalms are in three ways central to the Christian hermeneutic: they are prayers of Christ, who used the Psalms extensively in the New Testament in his teachings and in his meditations and contemplations; they are prayers to Christ by the penitent believer; and they are prophecies about Christ. The Psalms can thus embody the paradoxes of Christianity; they can be both individual texts about

C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), Walter Brueggeman, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), among many others. The Psalms also maintain their significance in literary study, where they have been much discussed with respect to post-medieval literature; see, for example, Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Norton, 2007), a translation and critical commentary, and Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Milton's Epics and the Book of Psalms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), for a detailed consideration of the psalms' effect on literary work. Radzinowicz points out that Milton translated the seven penitential psalms, as well as Psalms 80–88, and highlights the psalmic background underpinning many of the themes in Milton's major works.

³ Now generally accepted, this analysis of the Psalms was most firmly propounded by Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. by Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

nationalistic concerns and also universal statements about the all-conquering power of God. They speak to and for both the individual and the community; they scream their anger and shout their delight at the actions of God. The lament psalms, in particular, could reflect deep personal anguish and distress, could reproach God in prayer with a kind of fearless honesty, but would also be intense statements about the suffering of Christ and God on behalf of humanity.

An individual Christian could use the lament psalms to record desperate personal woe and to reach for an end to grief, sometimes successfully, but not invariably. The oscillation between agonizing suffering and absolute trust in God is at the core of the lament psalm; the cry of despair melts into the paean of praise, the moan of anguish transmutes into joyous praise of both the existence and the efficacy of God. Sometimes the consolation at the end of a lament psalm is calmer or does not seem to follow logically from the grief-stricken abuse, and occasionally there is no consolation offered at all. Nonetheless, the lament psalms serve a critical purpose in the Hebrew psalter, in its many Latin translations including the three versions available in the early Middle Ages in Europe (four if the original so-called Old Latin translation is included), and in its very many vernacular interpretations and allusions.⁴

⁴ The Old Latin texts of the Psalms survive in some liturgical usages; the three available medieval Latin versions of the psalter are thought to derive from three different renditions by Jerome. The first, the Roman psalter, was quickly disseminated and remained in use until quite late in some of the outposts of the Christian empire (in England, copies of the Roman psalter were still being made, even at Canterbury, in the eleventh century). The second was corrected and altered in comparison with Origen's text of the Bible and other available texts; it was the text adopted by Alcuin and the Carolingian court for what later became the Vulgate, hence it is commonly known as the Gallican psalter. The third, used only for scholarly purposes, was prepared by comparison with Hebrew versions of the Psalms and is thereby known as the Hebrew psalter or the Hebraicum. The psalters that were glossed, copied, and translated in Anglo-Saxon and medieval England were the Roman psalter (this was used into the eleventh century, albeit patchily) and the Gallican psalter (this version gradually took over in Anglo-Saxon England and was the only source text used in the later medieval period). Many good conspectuses of the Latin psalter in England exist; see, for example, Helmut Gneuss, 'Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England and their Old English Terminology', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 91–141; Phillip Pulsiano, 'Psalters', in *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Richard W. Pfaff, Old English Newsletter Subsidia, 23 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 61–85; M. J. Toswell, 'Psalter Manuscripts', *Old English Newsletter*, 28 (1995), A25–33; and *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, Henry Bradshaw Society, 106 (London: Boydell, 1991).

As much as the language of grief and lament provided a vocabulary for sorrow in the vernacular, so also did the structure of the lament psalms provide a pattern for vernacular lament. The opening cry of pain shifts into the lament itself and the establishment of its parameters, followed by a confession or statement of trust in God, a statement of reasons why God should act to alleviate the situation, a series of petitions asking God to listen or to save the lamenting individual or in other ways redress the situation, and a closing vow of praise. Not all these structural elements are present in all the thirty-nine psalms of individual lament (a further dozen or so reflect community laments), but this general pattern holds true throughout the psalter.⁵ For example, Psalm 88 begins with a first-person petition to God indicating that the psalmist has ‘cried in the day, and in the night’ and asks God to ‘incline thy ear unto my petition’ (3).⁶ The lament proper is particularly graphic as the psalmist’s soul is ‘filled with evils’ (4), the psalmist laid ‘in the lower pit: in the dark places, and in the shadow of death’ (7). God is attacking the psalmist with his anger, with his storms, and depriving the petitioner of friends. A typical feature of the lament psalms is the rhetorical question to God, sometimes offering two options as to how the Lord might treat the psalmist. Psalm 88 has four of these, complaining against God’s behaviour, with a repetition of the complaint that the psalmist has cried and prayed early (11–15). The last four verses of the psalm increase the level of the complaint, as the psalmist is suffering God’s terrors with a troubled mind: ‘Thy wrath hath come upon me: and thy terrors have troubled me’ (17). Again the enemies encompass the psalmist, and the friends and acquaintances are put away and hidden from the psalmist’s sight. The psalm thus shifts back and forth among statements about the psalmist’s woes and complaints to God both for having caused those troubles and for not redressing the situation. Doublet verbs and parallel structures, repetitions of earlier complaints with further details, and an oscillation between accusations to God and statements of the psalmist’s

⁵ Different psalter commentators have very different lists of the traditional subcategories of the Psalms. I have used here the lists of Gillingham, *Poems and Psalms*, though I have tried in the ensuing analyses to consider the lament psalms which are generally agreed upon.

⁶ For this preliminary discussion I quote from the Douay-Rheims English translation of the Latin Vulgate, first completed in 1609 and revised by Richard Challoner in the eighteenth century. This version is now most readily available at *Douai-Rheims Bible*, <<http://www.drbo.org>>; see also *The Holy Bible: The Catholic Bible, Douay-Rheims Version, Translated from the Latin Vulgate and Diligently Compared with the Hebrew, Greek and Other Editions*, ed. by Richard Challoner (Geneva: Benziger, 1941). Because this version was translated closely from the Vulgate, it offers a somewhat medieval cadence and serves well to introduce the Psalms as a literary influence.

misery, looking out and looking in, mark the psalm. This particular psalm reaches no consolation and ends on the note of desolation that friends and acquaintances are 'put far from me' and the psalmist suffers 'because of misery' (19).

By contrast, Psalm 143, the seventh and last penitential psalm, begins with the typical cry to 'Hear, O Lord, my prayer' (1), but here the lament itself concerns first the psalmist's enemies but more particularly the psalmist's own failings, vexed spirit, and desolate heart. The psalmist in the present is miserable but remembers happiness with God in times past; in the second half of the psalm, the psalmist addresses God directly, begging that God 'turn not away thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit' (7). The psalmist thus explains why God should work to help, and then petitions for loving-kindness in the morning (the lament psalms typically use the imagery of light and dark, and particularly associate the kindness of God with the morning, and with answering prayer in the early light of the day). The petitions to God turn to praise of God, and the expectation that God will lead the psalmist out of trouble and into 'the right land' (10). This psalm ends not with a closing vow of praise, but with a closing curse against the psalmist's enemies: 'And in thy mercy thou wilt destroy my enemies. And thou wilt cut off all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant' (12). The closing curse turns the misery of the psalmist in the lament outwards towards enemies; the psalmist of the lament psalms, even having achieved consolation, is a lonely and alienated soul.

Finally, the typical structure of the lament psalm is perhaps best exemplified by Psalm 7, which combines the opening cry of pain with a statement of trust in God: 'O Lord my God, in thee have I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me' (2). The next verse states the possible consequences, that the psalmist's soul should be devoured like a lion, so it is clear why God should act. The psalmist then moves into a series of conditional statements, also typical of the lament psalms as a group, indicating things that the psalmist might have done to anger the Lord and suggesting possible consequences. The central verses of the psalm praise God and petition God to judge well the ungodly and the just, and describe God's manifest qualities as a righteous judge. Where the first-person narrator of the psalm confidently expects salvation from God, the psalmist turns just before the end of the song to the sinner who will not turn to God and elaborately describes his travails and his fate. His wickedness will fall upon his own head. Thus the psalmist clarifies the possible outcomes for those who do not follow and praise God, having determined earlier the miseries and sorrows that the psalmist deserves for rewarding evil. In the last verse, the psalmist provides a closing vow of praise: 'I will give glory to the Lord according to his justice: and will sing to the name of the Lord the most high' (18). The structure of the psalm involves a constant

alternation between the negative and the positive, the cry of pain with the statement of trust, followed by an elaboration of the consequences for both elements — misery and eternal damnation on the one hand, and delighted joy in God on the other — with elements in praise of God, and a conclusion which offers a final consolation, and a statement about what will happen to those who do not sufficiently follow God. Thus the lament psalms as a group alternate between grief and faith, punishment and salvation, enemies and friends, being alone and being with God, misery and trust. As a genre they perhaps mark a deeper faith than might seem apparent, since the laments clearly demonstrate a belief in both the existence and the efficacy of God. Their anguish and questioning, their suffering and disorientation, their utter lack of resignation and insistence on change: these features of the lament psalm reflect a profound understanding both that the world is not as it should be and that God can correct it.

The psalter is essentially the book of the Bible most commonly separated for circulation on its own, both for public worship and private devotion. In the early Middle Ages, the psalter was the core of both communal and individual Christianity, central to the offices and to private prayer, and also prominent in the rest of the liturgy. Because of its frequent use separate from the other biblical texts, the medieval psalter accreted to itself many ancillary texts useful for a monastic, a cleric, and a secular individual: most commonly calendars, computistical materials, hymns and canticles, prefaces, prayers, and liturgies. Through the early medieval period psalters developed sets of rubrics and argumenta, and especially illustrations.⁷ Interest also developed in understanding the Psalms, which meant that glosses in the vernacular and in Latin, and *scholia* to explicate the Psalms became

⁷ One of the more famous illustrated manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon England is the Harley Psalter (London, British Library, MS Harley 603), which expands from the line-drawing of its model, the Utrecht Psalter (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek MS 32), to provide an illustrative programme that illuminates both daily life in the eleventh century and the Anglo-Saxon perception of psalmic events. See William Noel, *The Harley Psalter*, Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), passim. Sally Crawford makes great use of the Harley Psalter in her *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1999) to point out that there are many scenes of parents cuddling and caressing their children and that children are clearly distinguished from adults by their clothing (they wear tunics or sometimes are nude) and by their eating. She uses these features, and a very graphic and gruesome depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents, to suggest that Anglo-Saxon families were nuclear and that parents had great affection for their children. Mary Dockray-Miller makes a similar argument in her *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), though sadly she does not use evidence from the psalters, focusing instead on the practice of maternal performance in seventh- and eighth-century abbess-mothers in Kent, as well as Æthelflæd, and the mothers in *Beowulf*.

a part of the medieval psalter. Finally, fully vernacular translations of the Psalms took place by the late ninth and in the tenth centuries and became steadily more acceptable in late medieval England.⁸

In England the vernacular interpretations and allusions to the Psalms mark both the earliest and the latest examples we have extant of Old English. The Blickling Psalter (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 776) and Vespasian Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A I) have glosses which date from the eighth century, the former sporadic and the latter a conscious and careful effort to prepare a literal and straightforward interlinear gloss to the Psalms.⁹ At the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, it is becoming clear that at least four of the extant glossed psalters were prepared after, and even long after, the Conquest: the Arundel Psalter (London, British Library, MS Arundel 60) having been copied at Winchester in the years just after 1070, the Tiberius Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C VI) having a terminus post quem of 1064 and also being likely to have been copied and illustrated after the Conquest, the Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury, Cathedral Library, MS 150) with its OE gloss added around 1100, and the Eadwine or Canterbury Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.17.1) with a very late OE gloss from twelfth-century Canterbury.¹⁰

⁸ See Minnie Cate Morrell, *A Manual of Old English Biblical Materials* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), and the general remarks at the beginning of M. J. Toswell, 'Awended on Englisum Gereorde: Translation and the Old English Metrical Psalter', *Translation & Literature*, 5 (1996), 167–82.

⁹ See *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. by Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965). The glosses to the Blickling Psalter are published piecemeal: see 'The Blickling Glosses', in *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, ed. by R. Morris, Early English Text Society, o.s., 58, 63, 73 (London: Trübner, 1874–80; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 253–63, and for most of the glosses in the red ink of the rubrics, see *The Oldest English Texts*, ed. by H. Sweet, Early English Text Society, o.s., 83 (London: Trübner, 1885), pp. 122–23. For the glosses falling in the first quinquagene, see now *Old English Glossed Psalters, Psalms 1–50*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹⁰ The dating of late Old English and early Middle English manuscripts is occasioning serious concern among scholars. The best recent consideration is Richard Gameson's catalogue, *The Manuscripts of Early Norman England c. 1066–1130*, British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); see also Helmut Gneuss, *A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 241 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001). The project 'The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1066 to 1220' at the Universities of Leeds and Leicester may also clarify the issues; see <<http://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220>>. The relationships among the glossed psalters and their differing purposes are also vexed questions; the best analysis remains Franck-Günter Berghaus,

Psalter glosses thus provide us both with the earliest texts in the English vernacular and with some of the latest. Furthermore, at least three, and perhaps more, individuals in Anglo-Saxon England chose to move one very large step beyond glossing the Psalms and produced vernacular translations: King Alfred of the first fifty psalms in prose, an anonymous translator of the entire text into late Old English verse in a version surviving largely in the manuscript known as the Paris Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fonds latin 8824), and an anonymous Kentish translator of Psalm 51, the *Miserere*.

Moving beyond the copying or translation of the Psalms in Old English, the language and expression of the biblical Psalms has been posited in various Old English literary texts; Geoffrey Shepherd more specifically comments:

The Psalter was undoubtedly the book of the Bible best known to individual Anglo-Saxons in religion. It served as their private prayer-book as well as their basic school-book for learning ecclesiastical Latin. Psalter glosses are numerous. Many notable churchmen are reputed to have known the psalms by heart. There can be no surprise in finding that so many psalm passages were adapted into the vernacular. The influence is pervasive, often in phrase but also in form. The style and construction of many of the semi-lyrical, semi-elegiac pieces in the Exeter Book testify to this influence.¹¹

Various scholars have followed up this claim,¹² but oddly not in the most obvious texts: the elegies referred to by Shepherd, specifically the texts which are affected

Die Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse der altenglischen Interlinearversionen des Psalters und der Cantica, Palaestra, 272 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), and see also Evert Wiesenekker, *Word be Worde, Andgit of Andgite: Translation Performance in the Old English Interlinear Glosses of the Vespasian, Regius, and Lambeth Psalters* (Huizen: Bout & Zonen, 1991).

¹¹ Geoffrey Shepherd, 'Scriptural Poetry', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. by E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 1–36; repr. in *Poets and Prophets: Essays in Medieval Studies by G. T. Shepherd*, ed. by T. A. Shippey and John Pickles (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 11–46 (p. 23).

¹² For example, elsewhere in the same article, Shepherd himself points out parallels in the *Dream of the Rood* to the Psalms ('Scriptural Poetry', p. 26), and the way in which *Homiletic Fragment I* bases itself on Psalm 27 (*ibid.*, p. 22). Similarly, Ruth Wehlau points out that *The Order of the World* depends on Psalm 18; see her 'Rumination and Re-Creation: Poetic Instruction in *The Order of the World*', *Florilegium*, 13 (1994), 65–77. Andy Orchard makes a similar argument for *Cædmon's Hymn* in 'Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation: The Making of *Cædmon's Hymn*', in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'. Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 402–22. Most recently, see Fred C. Robinson, 'Secular Poetry', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 281–95, which points out on p. 292 that *Maxims I* incorporates Psalm 95. 5 in one section.

most clearly by the lament psalms, both in structure and in usage. Before turning to the language and structure of the Psalms in these texts, however, the lesser-known but extremely relevant Old English translations of the Psalms merit attention.

King Alfred certainly understood the efficacy of the Psalms and worked hard to address the ways in which the psalter spoke most clearly to him and to the English; his translation of the first fifty psalms includes many lament psalms, about half of which occur in the first third or first quinquagene of the psalter. The division of the psalter into 'three fifties' was originally Irish, but was by the late ninth century more generally accepted. In addition to his prose translation of the Roman psalter text, Alfred also provided prose introductions for each psalm which explained the theme of each psalm and the way in which that theme would be reflected in several methods of interpretation.¹³ Instead of the traditional four levels of exegesis (literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical),¹⁴ Alfred commonly provided two levels of literal or historical exegesis, one applying the psalm to David and the second applying it to other Old Testament figures and events, before providing the mystical or tropological meaning which applies the text to Christ, and the anagogical application to every moral Christian. Thus, for example, the first of the lament psalms, Psalm 3, has as its introduction:

Dysne þriddan sealm Daid sang þa he fleah Absalon his sunu, and seofode þa yrmðe to Drihtne; swa ðeþ ælc þæra manna þe þysne sealm singð, his sylfes earfoðu, ægðer ge modes ge lichaman, he seofað to Drihtne; swa dyde Crist þonne he þysne sealm sang: be ludeum he hine sang and be Iudan Scarioth þe hine læwde.¹⁵

[David sang this third psalm when he fled from Absalon his son, and lamented the misery to the Lord; just as each of those individuals do who sing this psalm, concerning their own sufferings, both in spirit and in body; he laments to the Lord; just as Christ did when he sang this psalm: he himself sang about the Jews and about Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.]

¹³ See *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, ed. by Patrick P. O'Neill (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 2001), pp. 23–30. A more extensive analysis is O'Neill's 'The Old English Introductions to the Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter: Sources, Structure, and Composition', *Studies in Philology*, 78 (1981), 20–38.

¹⁴ Based on Augustine, Gregory, and Cassian, this approach is nowadays most readily available, especially for literary scholars, in D. W. Robertson, Jr, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), but see also the entries under 'History of Interpretation', in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation*, ed. by O'Neill, p. 101. All translations are my own.

Here only three levels of interpretation are included, although the first has two parts describing the specific circumstances of David's lament and his sorrow; Alfred then turns to the anagogical interpretation for the individual who suffers in spirit and in body, and finishes with the tropological application to Christ and two sets of enemies he contended against. The applications throughout are concrete and clear; Alfred was not interested in subtle theological points, but in making the appropriate interpretations of the psalm intelligible for his reader or listener. David and Christ both lamented to the Lord, as do ordinary Christians who suffer in body and soul. The specific circumstances of the laments are provided for David and Christ and indicated for the individuals who are reading, reciting, or meditating upon this psalm translation. In short, Alfred used the elements of psalm exegesis and the fourfold interpretations of the psalms that interested him, turning to the concrete sufferings of David and Christ and to their application to the psalmist and the individual Christian. Alfred's construction of Psalm 3 was both human and personal.

The psalm itself begins with an invocation to God and two rhetorical questions (typical of many of the lament psalms) demanding to know how long the psalmist's enemies will afflict him and why so many are rising up against him. The Roman psalter, from which the verse is translated, simply states that so many are rising up against the psalmist ('multi insurgunt aduersum me');¹⁶ Alfred asks why they are doing so: 'for hwi arisað swa mænige wið me?' (2); Alfred's concern is personal and strategic.¹⁷ The psalm quickly alternates back to statements about the power and

¹⁶ Quotations from the Roman psalter are from *Le Psautier roman et les autres anciens psautiers latins*, Collectanea Biblica, 10 (Rome: Abbaye St Jérôme, 1953). Slightly easier to find and useful for comparative purposes (but not a trustworthy edition) is Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *Quincuplex psalterium* (1513; Geneva: Droz, 1979).

¹⁷ From here on my argument will tread around the edges of prosopological criticism, a very important field of study in the theology of the Psalms, and equally important in literary analysis. Prosopological analysis concerns itself with the voice, the speaker, and the point of view of the person saying the psalm, whether in its original incarnation as part of the Hebrew psalter or as part of an individual's translation or interpretation into the vernacular. Monika Otter addresses these issues and provides very useful bibliography in 'Entrances and Exits: Performing the Psalms in Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*', *Speculum*, 83 (2008), 283–302. Otter notes in particular that 'The "I" becomes elusive, shifting, a chorus of voices' (p. 294), offering both poetic and theological fine points. For my purposes here, I try fairly simply to ensure that when I draw conclusions about an individual's interpretation of the psalter, it derives from an element in the translation which was not in the Latin originals, or the most common interpretations and commentaries presumably available to that individual, or at least that it is clear that a willed choice was made in the

love of God, and Alfred uses a doublet noun to emphasize this in ‘þu eart [...] min fultum and min wuldor’ translating ‘tu autem Domine susceptor meus es gloria mea’ (4). The psalmist then shifts to a sense of consolation, sleeping in the secure certainty that God is near. Specifically, the psalmist sleeps, and Alfred has a clear sense of the cycle of life: ‘Ða ongan ic slapan, and slep, and eft aras, for ðam þe Drihten me awehte and me upparærde’ (Then I began to sleep, and slept, and again arose, because the Lord woke me and raised me up) translating ‘ego dormiui et somnum cepi et resurrexi quoniam Dominus suscepit me’ (6). The image of sleeping and then being awakened by God provides the close link between the true Christian and the divine that resolves the tension of the lament. This resolution continues, although the angry fear of the opening returns in the next verse as the psalmist brings back the surrounding enemies, this time in the context of not fearing them because of the certainty of being with God. The imagery of rising up continues: ‘Drihten, aris and gedo me halne’ (Lord, arise and make me safe) (‘exsurge Domine saluum me fac Deus meus’). Thus, the psalmist uses language of lifting, waking, and light to establish the certainty of God, and the attacking enemies of the lament’s opening by the end are turned into enemies slain by God. The psychological shift from fear to certainty, from anger to delight, completes itself in the last two verses as David the psalmist refers to God’s having, in the past, destroyed all enemies and crushed to pieces all the sinful ones. Alfred closes with another doublet, describing God as ‘eall ure hæl and ure tohopa’ (all our deliverance and our expectation) (translating the simpler ‘Dominus est salus’), providing a blessing for his folk. The paraphrase of the Roman psalter is relatively loose, and Alfred’s rhetorical and thematic choices emphasize the swing between the psalmist’s opening sense of surrounding enemies and the heavily stressed consolation with God.

Psalm 6 has a similar structure, although in this case Alfred provides four exegetical interpretations in the prefatory material, linking the psalm first to David, who sang this psalm ‘be his mettrumnesse and be his earfoðum’ (concerning his weakness and concerning his sufferings). Alfred then adds a further clause to the Davidic interpretation, linking the psalm to his ‘ege þæs domes on Domesdæge’ (fear of judgement on Judgement Day), an apocalyptic linkage which moves beyond the literal interpretation and touches upon the allegorical. The next interpretation is the anagogical, tying David’s purpose in singing the psalm directly to every individual who sings it: ‘and swa deð ælc þæra þe hine singð’ (and in this way does

production of the rendition. While this does not solve the prosopological difficulties, well known in the Middle Ages, it perhaps reduces their significance.

each of those who sings it [the psalm])). The penultimate interpretation moves to the christological or allegorical and uses the same term, 'earfoðum' (sufferings), to refer to his reasons for singing the psalm when he was on the earth. The christological interpretation here leans close to the historical, also tying the psalm to human experience on the earth. Finally, Alfred provides the second literal interpretation which is a hallmark of this text, indicating that Ezekiel also sang this psalm, in the Old Testament, 'be his untrumnesse' (concerning his sickness). The psalm itself consists of eight verses of lament by the psalmist, including rhetorical questions and petitions requesting the Lord's mercy, before turning in the penultimate verse to a statement of consolation that the prayer has been received, and a closing curse of the psalmist's enemies, a statement that they will be confounded and put to shame.

More specifically, Alfred renders the opening verse very literally as 'Drihten, ne þrea þu me on þinum yrre, ne on þinre hatheortnesse ne swenc me' (Lord, do not you rebuke me in your anger, nor afflict me in your fury) ('Domine ne in ira tua arguas me neque in furore tuo corripias me' (2)) and only begins to expand and alter the Roman psalter in the second membrum of the next verse, rendering 'miserere mihi Domine quoniam infirmus sum sana me Domine quoniam conturbata sunt omnia ossa mea' (3) as 'and gehæl me for þam eall min mægn and eal min ban synt gebrytt and gedrefed' (and heal me because all my power and all my bones are broken up and afflicted). The concrete image of the bones being crushed which occurs in the Latin psalter is somewhat diluted, perhaps following Augustine and other commentators who argue that the bones signify the soul and its strength. Alfred adds in the notion of the soul's power and refers to the bones not just as broken up but also as afflicted, so that there is hope for renewal and restoration.¹⁸ The paraphrase has doublet verbs and repeats the main image in such a way as to make it more comprehensible. Alfred further emphasizes the focus on the psalmist's soul with the doublet noun in the next membrum: 'min sawl and min mod' rendering 'anima mea' (4). The focus is clearly on the psalmist's soul and suffering, even further marking the text as a pure lament. The next verse is a lamenting query, a very loose rendering of 'et tu Domine usquequo' (4) as 'Eala, Drihten, hu lange

¹⁸ See Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. by H. Möller, 3 vols (Vienna: Academy of Austria, 2004); Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. by Maria Boulding, 6 vols (New York: New City Press, 2006), VI. 3–4. O'Neill annotates the verse with *uirtutes*, from the *Glossa Ordinaria*, but offers only 'power, strength' for *mægen* with respect to this verse in the glossary (*King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation*, ed. by O'Neill, pp. 174, 310). Elsewhere in Old English *mægen* has a broader range of meanings, which I have used here.

wylt þu þæt hit on ðam sy?’ (Alas, Lord, how long will you (allow) that it [= my soul] should be in that (suffering)?). The rhetorical question, anguished and focused on the time that the misery will last, leads into imperative petitions that the Lord turn and ‘alys mine sawle’ (release my soul) (‘eripe animam meam’ (5)). The next verse, the midpoint of the psalm, focuses on the dead who do not remember the Lord, and Alfred is quick to amplify that the relevant dead are those ‘þe on helle beoð’ (who are in hell) in order to clarify the doctrinal point that the saved Christian in heaven does remember God, adding that so also do those anticipating salvation on earth ‘swa swa we doð’ (just as we do) (6).

In the next verse Alfred repeats the misery of the psalmist, following the Latin closely but adding a doublet verb ‘sice and wepe’ (I sigh and weep) rather than use the concrete image from the source: ‘lacrimis stratum meum rigabo’ (I will water my couch with my tears) (7). The misery is again emphasized, as it is also in the following verse with ‘Mine eagan synt gedrefede for yrre’ (My eyes are afflicted through anger) (‘turbata est prae ira oculus meus’ (8)); time is again an issue, as it often is in the lament psalms, as Alfred has the psalmist stating ‘and ic eam forealdod betweoh eallum minum feondum’ (and I am grown old amongst all my enemies) (‘inueteraui inter omnes inimicos meos’). In the laments, time is always against the psalmist, looking either to a future without a clear sense of when God will stop the persecution or to a present which indicates that youth has already turned to age. The penultimate verse of the psalm reverts to the imperative mode, ordering the psalmist’s enemies to go away, and very briefly indicating that God’s consolation has been granted. The consolation here is very short, in three brief clauses repeating God’s having heard the psalmist in three different ways. The final verse is an indirect command, really a curse: ‘Sceamien heora for ði and syn gedrefede ealle mine fynd, and gan hy on earsling, and sceamien heora swiðe hrædllice’ (May they therefore be shamed and be afflicted, all my enemies, and go backwards, and may they be greatly suddenly shamed (confounded)), rendering ‘erubescant et conturbentur omnes inimici mei auertantur retrorsum et erubescant ualde uelociter’. The malediction is clear; the psalmist’s enemies are to be afflicted and turned back; Alfred renders the Latin word by word.

Alfred’s approach to the rendition of the Psalms in the vernacular is very learned and very intelligent. Whether or not he did all the work himself or worked in concert with one of the thinkers in his orbit, the translation very much reflects the response to the psalter of an individual Anglo-Saxon in the ninth century.¹⁹ He

¹⁹ Alfred’s practice has been much discussed; a good summary and analysis is Allen J. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston: Twayne, 1986); the most fully developed discussion is Nicole Discenza, *The*

is interested in what the psalter means for the modern Anglo-Saxon individual and so simplifies or omits many of the more difficult images or tricky doctrinal points from the Latin text he was using as a source. His Psalms are for the meditation and consideration of individuals reading or hearing (certainly not chanting or singing antiphonally) the Davidic songs. This may not be the case for the largest surviving verse translation of the Psalms from Anglo-Saxon England, the bulk of which survives in the same manuscript as the unique copy of the Alfredian Psalms: the Paris Psalter. While it remains most likely that here, too, the psalm translation running beside the Latin of the Roman psalter in a double column was intended to be read and studied, with the eye moving back and forth across the columns from the vernacular to the sacred language, it remains possible that the metrical psalter had other and more public uses as well, perhaps being sung or chanted as part of the liturgy, or perhaps simply being read aloud as a poetic and readily comprehensible version of the sacred Latin text. In any case, in addition to scattered verses from the first fifty psalms (which prove that the metrical psalter was a completed version of the psalter), the better part of the last hundred psalms survives in the Paris Psalter.

Although the proportion of lament psalms is highest in the first fifty psalms, the last two quinquagenes have twenty-two individual laments, beginning with the most famous lament psalm of the psalter, the *Miserere*, Psalm 51. One of these texts may perhaps serve to demonstrate the radically different way in which the psalter poet approached the translation of the sacred text. Unlike Alfred, the psalter versifier does not provide any additional prefatory exegesis in the vernacular, although the Paris Psalter manuscript has one complete set of psalter rubrics, the Latin introductions to the Psalms.²⁰ Instead, as in the opening of Psalm 130 (Vulgate numbering, 129 in the Roman psalter), the metrical psalter moves directly into its paraphrase of the opening line 'De profundis clamaui ad te Domine', translating the Latin as 'Ic of grundum to þe geomur cleopode' (I called out to you miserably from the depths). The poet adds the adverb *geomur*, perhaps principally for alliteration at the head stave, but emphasis also falls on the sad state of mind of the psalmist at the beginning of the lament. Similarly, the sentiment in the next verse is marked by repetition so that the psalmist's petition to God is clearly stated and restated. Thus, 'Domine exaudi orationem meam' becomes 'drihten, drihten, do

King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

²⁰ The set used in the Paris Psalter bears a close resemblance to the first series, that attributed to Columba, in *Les 'Tituli psalmorum' des manuscrits latins*, ed. by Pierre Salmon (Rome: Abbaye de St Jérôme, 1959).

þu nu ða, þæt þu mines gebedes bene gehyre' (Lord, lord, you must now make (it) in this way, that you hear the petition of my prayer): *bene* and *gebedes* are synonyms, also for alliteration, but they also serve to mark the prayerful attitude of the psalmist, to focus on the individual and the request for attention from the Lord. The focus on the distance between God and the psalmist holds throughout the song: in verse 3 the tautologous *drihten drihten* recurs (this time rendering a repetition in the Roman psalter) and the poet also includes two epithets for God, 'mihta wealdend' (ruler of the powers) and 'ece drihten' (eternal Lord). Once again, the psalmist's soul comes to the Lord first in the early hours of the morning, 'fram þære mæran mergentide' (from the glorious morning-time), and in this psalm remains till 'æfen cume' (evening should come). The Old English poet also extrapolates from the individual to the general, all the Israelites who 'ylda bearnum Israhelas on drihten agetreowen' (for the sons of the generations, the Israelites who must have faith eternally in the Lord). As in Alfred's translation, the extrapolation here is to the literal happenings in the Old Testament, not to an allegorical or anagogical interpretation. The psalm closes with statements about the Lord's mercy and willingness to save those who 'hiht on hine habbað fæstne' (have firm joy in him) and his repetitive willingness to 'ealle alyseð of unrihte æghwær symble' (absolve completely everywhere always from sin) those who believe in him. The tautology in the vernacular functions principally for prosodic purposes, but also marks the psalmist's absolute belief in the power and mercy of God. This psalm, which began in the depths, finishes in the heights.

Generalizing from these few examples of the Psalms, and especially of the Psalms in translation in Old English, offers many perils. Nonetheless, it may be said that the Anglo-Saxon scholars who produced their translations were interested in the literal and historical psalms, such that the allegorical, exegetical, and anagogical interpretations rarely appear in the translations, and not at all in the Psalms considered here. On the other hand, also absent is the literalism that might be expected, the sense that each letter and word of the divine scripture had to be taken over into the target language as accurately and precisely as possible. Both Alfred and the Paris Psalter poet freely chose what elements of the psalm they wished to emphasize and took advantage of the repetitious nature of the Psalms to replicate the pleonasm or reject it, as seemed best in each case. Both also, however, worked verse by verse, so that the structure of each psalm, with the typical alternation between complaint and praise, statements about the psalmist's life and expressions of hope in God, remained a striking feature of the Old English renditions of the Roman psalter. A similar structural and thematic pattern, with alternation between personal misery and more general statements or proverbs, is central to the

Old English elegy. In these largely original short poems, such as *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, the lament psalms live again, as noted already, but not in detail, by Geoffrey Shepherd.

For example, *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a profoundly allusive and complex poem, with concrete images whose meaning is difficult to decode. One half-line, *Ungelic is us*, is repeated at lines 3 and 8, almost antiphonally in the kind of refrain that was used first for Psalms, and later for many liturgical purposes, from early Christianity onwards. The vocabulary is very repetitive, using parallelism and anaphora to build and aggregate phrases and clauses that echo each other and each alter the meaning incrementally. The poem sets up oppositions, between the two islands on which the protagonist and her Wulf find themselves, between the two individuals and their enemies, and with the result of their being together (which may be their love, or their child, or their wolf-cub) which is carried away from them. In the last lines of this short poem (fourteen lines in total), the narrator makes it clear that the two individuals never really found their way together, in that 'Þæt mon eaþe toslited þætte næfre gesomnad wæs, | uncer giedd geador' (someone easily tears apart that which never was joined as one, our twofold lament together).²¹ The lack of consolation is absolute, because there never was a sense of completion, of having found or even sought the opportunity for some certainty, the kind of salvation available through Christianity.²² The poem offers only the first part of a lament psalm, the expressions of anguish and the horror of enemies who are attempting to destroy the narrator. The first-person female narrator is lamenting the loss of a lover, or a child, or a lover and a child, but does so in the concrete language of the Psalms. Enemies are 'wæltreowe' (blood-thirsty), and they hem the speaker in, encompassing her round about in ways very reminiscent of the lament psalms. The narrator is 'murnende mod' (sorrowing in mind) and 'reotugu' (weeping) at the distance from the lover. The imagery is clear and specific; if the poem were the opening lines of

²¹ Quotations from the Old English poems are taken from the standard edition: *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

²² There are many studies of the elegies, and in particular of the two *Frauenlieder*, this poem, and the *Wife's Lament*. For a detailed stylistic analysis of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, see especially Stanley B. Greenfield, 'Wulf and Eadwacer: All Passion Pent', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15 (1986), 5–14. For the argument that these two poems are very personal laments, and that the discovery of the individual predates Colin Morris's argument placing the development of individual consciousness in the twelfth century, see Fiona Gameson and Richard Gameson, 'Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, and the Discovery of the Individual in Old English Verse', in *Studies in English Language and Literature*, ed. by Toswell and Tyler, pp. 457–74.

a psalm it would be almost perfectly comprehensible, but it is not. It remains, however, a poem that uses psalmic language and structure, especially the strong and angry language of the lament psalms, to express sorrow that cannot achieve consolation. As in Psalm 88, the misery and alienation of the speaker knows no comfort, admits no consolation. The grief is absolute.

The Wife's Lament, a longer poem at fifty-three lines, offers more scope for analysing the shift, common to the Old English elegies, back and forth between personal misery and aphorism or gnomic statement.²³ It begins, as many of the lament psalms do, with the first-person misery of the female narrator: 'Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre | mine sylfre sið' (I make this lament about my own journey (experience), about myself, the very sorrowful one). If the journey is metaphorically the woman's journey through life, reflecting the biblical image of life as a pilgrimage, then the opening statement marks the misery, the isolation, and the creative ability of the speaker, voicing her own pain in a poem. The resemblances to the very personal misery of David in the penitential psalms and the other psalms ascribed to him are not few. The poem is nostalgic, remembering lost happiness, and constantly contrasting past delights with present misery. When she meditates upon the joy she had with a lover, 'ful oft wit beotedan | þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana' (very often we two vowed that nothing save death alone would separate us) (lines 21b–22), the remembered joy turns back upon itself almost immediately: 'Eft is þæt onhworfen. | Is nu swa hit no wære | freondscipe uncer' (That is changed back again; the friendship of the two of us is now as if it never had been) (lines 23b–25a). The speaker is trapped in the grief of the present, recalling a joyous past that was ended by outside forces. The enemies encompassing the speaker round about take over in the second half of the poem, forcing the speaker into an 'eorðsele' (earth-hall, perhaps a grave, perhaps a prison), an ambiguous but very concrete image since her surroundings are briars, dark and high hills, and an oak tree. As in the Psalms, the images of suffering are clear and potent and absolute; there is no half-way suffering here but full-out anxiety and misery, and perhaps misery in a traumatic death. Throughout the poem the speaker is threatened by water: separated by it from her love, and also seeing it surround the man of whom she thinks 'min freond' (my friend) so that he is dangerously cut off from safety and security in the world. In the Psalms water is often threatening, and if not

²³ The analysis which follows reflects to some extent discussions held when I had the felicity of supervising the undergraduate thesis of Heather Desserud, entitled 'Poetic Exile: The Influence of the Lamentation Psalms on Two Old English Elegies' (unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007).

actively drawing the speaker down into the abyss or the deep of the sea, marking the misery of the speaker with tears and the flowing water of pathetic fallacy which concords rivers with lamenting tears. The speaker 'wepan mæg' (is able to weep) (line 38) in her prison, the only action she is permitted to take. At the end of the poem she utters a kind of gnomic curse: 'Wa bið þam þe sceal | of langoþe leofes abidan!' (Woe be to the one who must endure longing for the beloved) (lines 52b–53). The poem ends on a desolate note, that of dull longing, of joyless misery, of dismal endurance in the bootless hope that the beloved might come. Unlike the lament psalms which offer consolation, or the Song of Songs, the beloved clearly will not come.

These two poems, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, are often set aside from the other laments and described as too personal, too miserable, lacking a consolation, or just different — perhaps, one might wonder, because they are so obviously spoken by a woman — from the other elegiac poems. And yet, the concreteness of the imagery and the structure of alternating between individual lament and generalized statements of sapience tie these poems very closely to the other elegies. They differ, perhaps, only as much from *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as the different lament psalms do from each other. All written in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501), the commonplace book of Bishop Leofric of Exeter,²⁴ these texts — almost certainly chosen by him — offered an opportunity to reflect on human life, especially human misery, and to grieve. Some of them, as do some of the lament psalms, offered consolation, even Christian consolation, at the end; the two discussed here do not. Dominick LaCapra refers to 'a past that will not pass away' as a central feature of trauma response; the narrators here are caught in the narratives of their trauma.²⁵

The Middle English approach to the Psalms in the vernacular is fully documented, but the extent to which it provides a template and approach for Middle English lament poems and lyrics remains even more undocumented than the connection in Old English.²⁶ Given that the glossed psalters generally described as

²⁴ For the background of the Exeter Book and its codicology, see Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993).

²⁵ See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. xiv.

²⁶ See especially James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), which comprehensively catalogues the Middle English texts based on the Bible, providing manuscript information, consideration of sources and editions, and a conspectus of biblical material present in the text. The section on the psalters includes several

Old English were created through and long after the Conquest, the continuing concern with having the Psalms in the vernacular makes the English prose psalter produced in the West Midlands in the early fourteenth century more a continuation of a tradition than a first encounter. Wyclif and his followers engaged in meditations on the Psalms, Richard Rolle going so far as to produce a complete translation. Certainly, translation and meditation on the Psalms had a very personal valence in the late Middle English period, a private approach which is clear both from these texts and from the work of Eleanor Hull, who chose to translate a French commentary on the seven penitential psalms into English in the fifteenth century.²⁷ John Lydgate explicitly translated several psalms, including Psalms 42, 53, 88, and 102 (all but 53 lament psalms). Similarly, Thomas Brampton and Richard Maidstone both produced a paraphrase of the penitential psalms, and the works of Walter Hilton are arguably a series of psalm commentaries. Psalm 50 in particular garnered attention, perhaps the most famous of the penitential lament psalms, with three different translations in the vernacular. Psalm 129, the *De profundis*, also had its own verse translation, surviving in a sixteenth-century manuscript. Moreover, the literary structure of lament established itself very firmly in Middle English literature, beginning with short lyrics and developing into detailed allegorical and narrative structures, resembling some of the more extensive psalms including the *Miserere*, such as Chaucer's dream vision the *Book of the Duchess*, some of his complaint poems, and especially the complaint poems of Thomas Hoccleve and the psalm imitations of John Lydgate.²⁸

texts not addressed here (pp. 172–94). The only extended analysis of the Psalms at work in Middle English texts is Michael P. Kuczynski, *Prophetic Song: The Psalms as Moral Discourse in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), which works carefully through medieval approaches to the Psalms, finishing with the ideological approaches of the Lollards, Lydgate, and especially William Langland. Kuczynski appears to move in the direction I am espousing here in his chap. 4, 'The Psalms as Models for Middle English Poetry', but the chapter considers psalm translations and interpretations rather than Middle English poetry structured on the Psalms.

²⁷ See Dame Eleanor Hull, *The Seven Psalms: A Commentary on the Penitential Psalms Translated from French into English*, ed. by Alexandra Barratt, Early English Text Society, o.s., 307 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Barratt suggests that Dame Eleanor made this translation of an unknown French monastic treatise in the 1420s while she was sporadically living at Sopwell Priory.

²⁸ The way in which the Bible functions in Middle English literary texts has been discussed in various places. See David C. Fowler, *The Bible in Middle English Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), for a particularly detailed analysis of the *Pearl* poet and *Piers*

In the later medieval period, psalters gradually gave way to books of hours as the premier text of private devotion, but the shift was a very gradual one, and perhaps was less complete than is usually thought by the end of the fourteenth century. Grand psalters with fully developed programmes of illumination — such as the Luttrell Psalter (London, British Library, Additional MS 42130) or the Queen Mary Psalter (London, British Library, Royal MS 2 B. vii) or the twelfth-century Eadwine Psalter — were a significant feature of manuscript production in the Middle Ages. There was also a continuing interest in double and triple psalters, and in psalter glosses and translations; also, psalter commentary only gradually gave way to the developing complex of *scholia* known as the *Glossa Ordinaria*. The comprehension of the Psalms through studying complexes of illustration, glosses, various *interpretamenta*, and translations remained a feature of both monastic and secular life in the later Middle Ages. Where the earlier Middle Ages had Bede producing an abbreviated psalter both as a mnemonic to remember the order and subject of the Psalms and as a meditational text in itself, the later Middle Ages had the *catena* of Peter Lombard and the meditations and commentary of Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Nicholas of Lyra. One example of late Middle English psalter translation and one example of Middle English lament poetry reflecting the structure and vocabulary of the Psalms will serve here to point towards the uses of the Psalms at the close of the Middle Ages.

The so-called ‘Earliest English Prose Psalter’ by an anonymous Midlands translator exists in three manuscripts.²⁹ It differs from the work of King Alfred in simply providing a very literal translation, with no explication or analysis of the psalm. The edition does not even include the rubrics which I suspect appear in the manuscripts, one of which also includes William of Shoreham’s religious poems, which

Plowman. Many entries in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by David Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992) are also relevant; see also Jeffrey’s *Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Scripture, Reading Culture* (Waco: Baylor University, 2003), and his *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). Piero Boitani engages in similar analysis in *The Bible and its Rewritings*, trans. by Anita Weston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁹ In a recent dissertation, Jake Lavender argues that the most recently discovered of these manuscripts, Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498, was the author’s holograph: ‘The Midland Prose Psalter: A Middle English Transcript Edition of MS Cambridge, Magdalene, Pepys 2498, ff. 263s–361s (Middle English Text)’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 2004). The only published edition of the text is Karl D. Bülbring, *The Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter*, Early English Text Society, o.s., 97 (London: Kegan Paul, 1891).

might also bear further study.³⁰ Two of the manuscripts are also double psalters, with the Latin text of each line, surrounded by *scholia*, followed by the Middle English translation, reflecting, for example, the alternate-line glossed psalter from very late Anglo-Saxon England known as the Cambridge Psalter (Cambridge, University Library MS Ff. I. 23). However, the translation reflects the glosses (projected to be published in a never-completed second volume of the text) rather than the Latin of the psalter. Thus, it would appear that vernacular versions of the Psalms throughout medieval England have a complex history involving both texts and commentaries or glosses. The opening of Psalm 55 (Vulgate 56) provides a sufficient introduction to the text:

1. Haue mercy on me God, for man hap defouled me; þe fende trubled me, feȝtand alday oȝayns me.
2. Myn enemys defouled m[e] alday, for many were feȝtand oȝains me.
3. Y shal drede þe fram þe heȝt of þe daye; y for-soþe shal hope in þe.

More even than the Latin source, the Middle English uses repetition, with ‘defouling’ and ‘fighting’ ‘all day’ ‘against me’, the psalmist; whereas the original speaks of eating or swallowing the psalmist (a terrifying and concrete image in itself), the vernacular shifts to the scatological notion of defiling, of fouling. The translation is plain, straightforward, but also clear and strong. Its existence in three manuscripts from the late Middle Ages suggests that it had some popularity and was useful for a bilingual audience interested in thinking about the Psalms and their explication.

Hoccleve well understood the convention of soliloquy and, as Roger Ellis puts it, the ‘convention of dialogue-as-(self)-discovery’.³¹ His work includes several dramatic soliloquies, including prayers to the crucified Christ, a lament of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, a parody of a penitential lyric describing the miseries of his life, and his more serious *Series*, the first poem of which is entitled ‘My compleinte’. Hoccleve opens with a poignant image of late fall and its ‘zelownesse’ (5), before commenting at some length on the mutability of the world: ‘stableness in this worlde is ther noon’ (9), and describing how at the end of November he found himself in bed and vexed with ‘the þouȝtful maladie’ (which Ellis annotates as ‘melancholia’). At the beginning of this complaint, this lament, the first-person narrator finds the world uncertain and unstable and begins to meditate upon the

³⁰ See London, British Library, MS Additional 17,376.

³¹ See Thomas Hoccleve, *My Compleinte and Other Poems*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), p. 5. Quotations from Hoccleve will be taken from this edition and referenced by line number in the text.

bright sun that shone upon his life in earlier times. Now, however, 'the sunne abated' (25) and now 'The greef aboute myn herte so sore swal | And bolned euere to and to so sore' (29–30, 'bolned' and 'swal' both mean 'swelled'). Hoccleve is overcome with grief, paralysed by sorrow, swollen by misery; his language and phraseology are also strikingly repetitious and employ the same kinds of rhetorical moves (polyptoton, synonyms, pleonasm) as those found in the lament psalms. In fact, Hoccleve shortly thereafter explicitly quotes Psalm 30: 'As seide is in þe sauter miȝt I sey, | "They þat me sy, fledden away fro me"' (78–79). His friends turn away from him, because 'I was al oute of mynde away' (80) or 'al brainseke' (129). The poem circles round and round this madness, as the lament of the speaker circles round and round, sometimes almost being clear and aware and sometimes befuddled and worried. He worries throughout about how others see him, a kind of riff on the enemies of the lament psalms, in that he quotes, or imagines himself as quoting, various individuals that he sees and encounters, and constructs their response to him, always hemming himself in to further suffering. He asks himself rhetorical questions (very much a lament feature), but cannot quite answer them. He imagines analogies to his situation, such as a drunken man, but he can return to his wits (225–30). The speaker cannot, and though he makes several moves in the direction of Christian faith, he concludes 'Hie tyme is me to crepe into my graue. | To lyue ioieles, what do I here?' (261–62). A few lines later, however, he is rejoicing in the comfort of God, 'Sith God hath made myn helpe home repeire' (278). Thus Hoccleve wavers back and forth between misery and cheer, hope and hopelessness. As he says, 'somedel had I rejoisinge amonge' (281), so that he had somewhat of rejoicing and gladness, but then a 'dirke clowde' (292) covers over the minds of his acquaintances, and they shift into spies who ask his colleagues about his state of mind, expecting to find him mad.

Hoccleve shifts at this point, perhaps unexpectedly, into genuine consolation. Elements of the misery and attacks of others remain in the last hundred lines of the poem, but the trajectory is basically that of a true lament psalm, elucidating misery and sorrow, a sense of being constrained and controlled, of living in a hell (even if, as with Hoccleve, the hell is his own mind), but then giving way to genuine consolation. Hoccleve says, at the turning point:

This other day a lamentacioun
Of a wooful man in a book I sy,
To whom wordis of consolacioun
Resoun ȝaf spekyng effectuelly,
And well esid myn herte was therby,
For whanne I had a while in þe book reed,
With the speche of Resoun was I wel feed. (309–15)

Suddenly a story in a book of a woeful man to whom words of consolation are effectively spoken can ease the speaker's heart, and he turns to the speech of Reason to be nourished properly. From misery to reason, to the justice of God, the narrator turns, and in the ensuing lines he maintains that sense of narrative movement, telling the story of that woeful man in more detail as a debate poem between Reason and the individual. Reason offers good sense, advising him to wrestle against 'heynesse | Of þe worlde, troublis, suffringe and duresse' (341–42) and to turn to God 'And seie, "To þee, lorde God, I haue agilte | So sore I moot for myn offensis smerte"' (366–67). The speaker of the lament describes the 'woeful man' as being advised to make his confession to God, to indicate that he needs to suffer for his sins, and eventually explicitly to repent. The parallels to the liturgy of the Mass are obvious, but so also is the linkage to the psychological engagement with grief, first by distancing it from the speaker, and then, gradually, by taking control of the situation. So the speaker says, after having finished the book, that 'Holsum and wiis had be my gouernance' (285). He will now be both wholesome and wise, and as for his sorrow, 'I caste it to the cok' (386) — a concrete but nonetheless tricky image, since it is difficult to determine what a rooster would do with the speaker's sorrow. In the final lines the speaker is easy with his God, and finishes with the usual lines of thanksgiving and praise: 'Laude and honour and þanke vnto þee be' (407), such that in the last line of the poem the speaker 'vnto thi mercy and grace I calle' (413). The pattern of the lament psalm draws to a close, as the speaker now calls on the mercy of God, in the certainty of finding it as opposed to the opening anguish of misery and alienation. Hoccleve, a highly self-aware poet and individual, writes here a complaint, a lament, which follows the trajectory and rhetorical techniques of a lament psalm. He adds his own personal circumstances, rather in the way that the lament psalms attributed to David have detailed personal situations described in the rubrics and implied in the text. Hoccleve is an anguished psalmist, but also a suffering individual.

Mourning is in the moment, with no sense of the future or of the past. The lament psalms exist in that moment of mourning and grief, and gain their power from the immediacy and directness of their complaint. Modern analyses of what is called 'grief work' suggest the absolute necessity for moving onwards through the stages of grief, of living in the moment of mourning for as long as it is necessary, and not forcing oneself to move on or to hide grief or to pretend that the loss was not immense.³² The lament psalms and the laments which use the same tropes, the

³² See, for example, the writings of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, especially *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

same sense of immediacy, and the same structures of complaint and consolation provide a way to perform that grief, to provide words for the work of mourning. Grendel's mother has no words with which to mourn and cannot move beyond her grief. The female narrator of *Wulf and Eadwacer* feels that any loving relationships she had are sundered so that she has no reason to live after her loss, but the narrators of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* achieve the brief consolation which is typical of the lament psalms. As to the more complicated situation of psalm translation itself, where in the ninth century even King Alfred worked through at least some of the customary levels of exegesis and rendered his versions of the Psalms verse by verse, in a much later generation John Milton could translate the Psalms and respond to their lyricism with his own original works. In all cases the lament psalms provide both a vocabulary and a structure for the work of grief, and an openness to emotion — especially strong emotion — which makes them fundamental to the expression of misery and terror. The ways in which they were used and adapted, and served as source or influence, varied over the Middle Ages, but their enduring popularity demonstrates clearly the medieval understanding that grief had to be spoken, to be voiced, in order to have any chance at being alleviated.

DUSTSCEAWUNG:

TEXTING THE DEAD IN THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES

Mary K. Ramsey

Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's sadness.¹

Death is the common experience of all living things, from single-cell creatures to the most complex organisms. Grief as a response to death, however, seems to be confined to a relatively small number of species, insofar as humans are able to understand the inner workings of minds that do not express themselves in language we understand. Evidence suggests that some species note the deaths of members within their social group and are directly affected by the loss, sometimes demonstrating depressive behaviours: refusal to eat, agitation, disconnection from social activities such as hunting and grooming, or other behaviours interpreted by observers as emblematic of grief. Humans, however, are the only creatures that mourn, commemorating the lives of the dead through ritual and symbol. Further, time and distance, which might logically serve to soften the edges of grief, can evaporate in a moment when a sound, a scent, a place, an object

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¹ Jacques Derrida, 'In Memoriam: Of the Soul', in his *The Work of Mourning*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 72–75 (p. 72). Reprinted, with changes, from 'In Memoriam: Of the Soul', trans. by Kevin Newmark, in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. by Cecile Lindsay and others (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. xv–xx.

evokes remembrance of those who have died and calls forth in us a response far greater even than our initial grief.

A colleague who teaches Jewish studies courses, including one focusing on the Holocaust, tells of his response to Geoffrey Hartman's account of his childhood evacuation from Frankfurt in March of 1939 via a *Kindertransport*.² His mother already in America, his grandmother too ill to accompany him, Hartman travelled with other boys his age, but without family. As he reports, he had been able to take only one family object: a violin entrusted to him to carry out of Germany to safety in England. The account in Hartman's book is relatively brief — a mere seven sentences — and he describes the trip as 'uneventful'. My colleague's retelling of the story included not just the salient details of the violin's significance and subsequent destruction, but also speculation, informed by his own boyhood experience, as to how that destruction may have occurred as he imagined a group of pre-adolescent boys cramped together with no room to play and nothing much to do, first on the train and later on the boat; naturally they would amuse themselves with the violin, perhaps initially cautious but eventually ruining the instrument through increasingly rough treatment. The tragedy of the story is that, once the case is finally shattered, the signature is visible: not a child's practice instrument, but a Stradivarius. A priceless treasure in its own right, its unique voice now silenced forever, in this context the violin becomes a repository of the stories of those lost, foremost perhaps Hartman's grandmother — her illness prevents her escape and she dies in Theresienstadt — but by extension all the six million, each individual life and the communities they represent: songs never to be played, stories never to be told.

In recounting Hartman's story, my colleague remarked that he had never wept for the six million, but that he wept for the Hartman Stradivarius. Perhaps it is easier to accept the loss of the instrument: one may grieve for a thing of beauty gone forever yet take comfort in the knowledge that the loss of a violin, even a Stradivarius, cannot equal the loss of six million lives, but the story of its loss can perhaps contain the greater tragedy, provide boundaries for mourning that make both grief and recovery from it possible. Further, the violin not only recalled the story of Hartman's travel in 1939 and the larger story of the Holocaust, it also provided a space in which my colleague considered his own identity as a Jew born in postwar America, at once a part of the story and yet apart from it.³

² Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 15.

³ A brief note cannot adequately represent the field, but some important discussions of memory and mourning in relation to the Holocaust include *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism*

In this essay I argue that in their recollection of times past and people lost, Old English elegies provided their Anglo-Saxon audiences a space for remembrance, for grief, and for examination of personal experience by both making hearers a part of and holding them apart from the images and stories the poems describe.⁴ The poems under discussion here include those that Joseph Harris has identified as exemplifying a later development in the history of Old English elegy: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin*.⁵ These poems share in the traits of Germanic elegy that Harris identifies generally as consisting 'predominantly of dramatic monologue in which a human speaks in the first person about the past, mostly his own past life. [...] The past may have been happy or unhappy or both, but the contrast with the speaker's present, a contrast invested with sadness, is constant'.⁶ What is particularly interesting about these three poems, however, is that, unlike elegies such as *Wulf and Eadwacer* or *The Wife's Lament*, the details of an individual situation of mourning are almost completely effaced; without such details, elegies like these offer hearers a textual space in which to mourn and words with

and the 'Final Solution', ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁴ In this essay, I use the terms 'elegy' and 'lament' interchangeably, though genre, per se, is not central to my argument. For discussions of genre with regard to these poems, see Anne L. Klinck, 'The Old English Elegy as a Genre', *English Studies in Canada*, 10 (June 1984), 129–40. Earlier studies include B. J. Timmer, 'The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry', *English Studies*, 24 (1942), 33–44; Stanley B. Greenfield, 'The Old English Elegies', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. by E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 142–75, and *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London: University of London Press, 1972); T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson, 1972) and *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Morton W. Bloomfield, 'The Elegy and the Elegiac Mode: Praise and Alienation', in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 147–57; María José Mora, 'The Invention of the Old English Elegy', *English Studies*, n.s., 7 (1995), 129–39.

⁵ Joseph Harris, 'Elegy in Old English and Old Norse: A Problem in Literary History', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), pp. 46–56 (pp. 46–49).

⁶ Harris, 'Elegy in Old English and Old Norse', pp. 46–47.

which to voice their own grief, to give it expression and shape, and, most importantly, to give it boundaries.⁷

It might seem that, because it recounts a life, hagiography would fit into this schema, but I wish to exclude it from this discussion as fulfilling a different cultural role. The story of a saint's life may initially accompany, and later supplant, the bodily relics, perhaps in influence but certainly in portability. Even when those who would remember the *vita* possessed portions of the actual physical body — and many saints apparently possessed far more limbs than nature bestowed on the rest of us, given the number of finger bones of Mary Magdalene or arm bones of St Ursula that circulated in the Middle Ages — even when the relics were present as the supposed locus of the saint's power, it was the stories attached to them that were more widespread and potentially far more powerful. Further, hagiography does not allow the reader or hearer to insert memory of his or her own lost loved one into the narrative space as the lament texts do; in saint's lives, all the spaces are taken by the specific actions of a specific person: these narrative bones are not, cannot be, anonymous.

In his comprehensive examination of the archeology of death and burial, Mike Parker Pearson reminds us that

[T]he dead are everywhere, inhabiting our memories and forming our world. We read or retell their stories, live in their houses, and work and play in the places that they created and used. Where we put their remains is generally a conscious and carefully thought-out activity by which the dead are both remembered and forgotten, and through which we reaffirm and construct our attitudes to death and the dead and, through these, to place and identity.⁸

I would like to begin by exploring the notion that the literature of lament in Old English is where the Anglo-Saxons 'put the remains', that the poetry is meant not

⁷ In 'The Old English Elegy: A Historicization', in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. by David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 30–45, Patrick W. Conner reminds us that all of the free-standing poems we refer to as Old English elegies are found in the Exeter Book. He argues that the audience of these poems was most likely members of the cathedral prayer guild and while his emphasis is on the value of the elegies as monastic capital, his contention that they 'once functioned to perpetuate, to guarantee, and to strengthen the social relationships necessary to the production of a monastic economic hegemony' (p. 34) is consistent with my conclusions about their social function, though much more narrowly defined. For a more detailed study of the Exeter Book in its cultural and manuscript context, see also Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), especially pp. 148–64.

⁸ Mike Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), p. 124.

only to tell the story of the dead, whether of individuals or communities, but also to stand metonymically in the place of the dead, just as the Hartman Stradivarius came to represent the six million who perished in the Holocaust. In this way, they provide a locus for grief, for remembrance, and through these, according to Pearson's taxonomy, they affirm their hearers' understandings both of the dead and of themselves.

The idea that a text about or representation of a person can function in place of that individual is hardly startling. Those who have lost loved ones know that without the aid of photographs, we can forget rather quickly the features of even the most important people in our lives when we see them no longer. We require aids to memory, whether physical objects associated with the person or representations of them: the narrative, photographic, iconographic remains of a life.⁹ Such mnemonic aids are more necessary for those who had only a passing acquaintance with the deceased in life, still more so for those who never knew the living person but only the stories that comprise his narrative. Ethnographers examining the function of grave goods and grave markers suggest that, for mourners, not only can the marker become the physical representation of the dead, but also, because of its

⁹ Hundreds of books on death, dying, and memory are currently available, but most of these focus on contemporary, or at most modern, attitudes and practices. Among the most wide-ranging historical treatments are Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. by Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), and Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. by Helen Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). Full treatment of the early Middle Ages is noticeably absent from Ariès's text, as from most others; because evidence is scant, most studies avoid discussing early medieval attitudes towards death and focus only on the archaeological artefacts with minimal interpretation. Still, broad conclusions about how death affects a community may be usefully extrapolated from discussions of later periods and other cultures; *The Hour of Our Death*, in particular, has lengthy discussions of memorial practices. Other important studies include Nigel Barley, *Grave Matters: A Lively History of Death around the World* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997); Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Susan Letzler Cole, *The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1985); Sandra M. Gilbert, *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (New York: Norton, 2006); Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. by Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John S. Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning: Individual and Social Realities* (New York: Free Press, 1985); Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

immediacy, the symbol can become the embodiment of the dead through a type of psychological transference.¹⁰ The remains of the body are hidden from view, but the grave marker is above ground and visible; it becomes the locus for grief. Especially for one who never knew the deceased, the grave marker stands in place of the person commemorated; with the passing of a generation, the dead are reduced to identification with the marker or the graveyard.¹¹ But what of graves that have no tombstone, no marker to point to the unique story of the individual buried there?

When many of us think of Anglo-Saxon burials, we think first, if not exclusively, of the so-called 'princely' or high-status burials of the late sixth and early seventh centuries. For many years, the ship burial found at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk), discovered in 1939, was the most common example cited; until recently, it was the largest undisturbed chamber burial that had been excavated using modern archaeological methods. Whereas Taplow (Buckinghamshire) was discovered in 1882, and an excavation undertaken, the methods used were far less sophisticated; while the finds were rich, undoubtedly much information was destroyed in the recovery. More recently, a lavish Anglo-Saxon chamber burial near Prittlewell (Essex) was unearthed in 2003 during routine excavation of a known Anglo-Saxon burial site preparatory to road work. The chamber of the Prittlewell Prince, as the occupant has come to be called, is similar to Sutton Hoo's Mound 1; the chamber is significantly larger, but is not part of a ship burial. The finds are still being analysed, but they are in many ways similar to the grave goods found at Sutton Hoo, Taplow, and elsewhere: they suggest a warrior, with fittings for male clothing such as buckles and clasps, swords, shields, and helmets; they also seem to recall life in the hall, with bowls, beakers, drinking horns, cups, and other vessels, as well as gaming pieces and lyres.¹²

¹⁰ Elizabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900–1200* (London: Macmillan, 1999), especially pp. 93–119.

¹¹ This argument is in part influenced by my reading of Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993), and Valerie Hope, 'Remembering Rome: Memory, Funerary Monuments and the Roman Soldier', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, ed. by Howard Williams (New York: Kluwer/Plenum, 2003), pp. 113–40.

¹² There has not yet been much published about the Prittlewell find, but a booklet was published to accompany an exhibit of the finds at the Museum of London in Docklands in 2004: Sue Hirst, *The Prittlewell Prince: The Discovery of a Rich Anglo-Saxon Burial in Essex* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2004). See also the Museum of London Archaeology Service's web page on Prittlewell, <<http://www.molas.org.uk/pages/siteReports.asp?siteid=pr03§ion=preface>>.

Still more enigmatic, however, are the humbler burial sites, whose occupants are seemingly less remarkable, in large measure because their remains have been treated quite differently than the occupants of the princely burials. They lack extensive grave goods, for one, and their graves are rarely associated with a monumental feature that physically alters the landscape, like the barrows of the Sutton Hoo ship burials, the mounds at Taplow, Swallowcliffe Down, and elsewhere, and other elaborate graves. Later burial sites show a marked reduction in, and finally disappearance of, grave goods, generally interpreted as evidence for the spread of Christianity, with its insistence on a life after death fully furnished by the heavenly lord, for which one need not tote along weapons, food, or any other earthly accoutrement, as all needs will be met. As a result, we know very little about these Anglo-Saxon dead beyond the few details regarding the grave itself: inhumation versus cremation, positioning of the body, surviving articles of dress or adornment, containment of the remains, and other physical features that have survived the centuries. Certainly we cannot identify these dead with anything like specificity or certainty; often we cannot determine so much as the sex of the deceased: they are anonymous bones. Indeed, the identity of even the persons memorialized in the richest of the Anglo-Saxon burial sites discovered thus far is contested. While many accept the identification of the dead man commemorated in Sutton Hoo Mound 1 as Rædwald, king of the East Anglians, the lavish Sutton Hoo grave itself is anonymous, unlike the fifth-century burial of the Frankish king Childeric, which contained a signet ring indicating his name and status, 'Childerici Regis'. Similarly, Ian Blair, senior archaeologist of the Museum of London Archaeology Service and the Prittlewell excavation's director, admits that we will likely never know for certain the identity of the Prittlewell Prince, but suggests that Sæbert, nephew of King Æthelbert of Kent and the first East Saxon king to convert to Christianity, is 'the only obvious candidate'.¹³ Taplow, too, gives us no specific information about the identity of the corpse, though the dead man may have been a retainer of the king of Kent entrusted with overseeing the king's interests in the Thames valley, which would make his mound burial on the headland overlooking the Thames in keeping with his role in life: the monument replaces the watcher. While the mound is far less efficacious as a sentinel, it may serve to remind viewers of the role of the retainer in whose place it stands.

But I return to the difficulty we face in identifying the occupants; none of these early graves has a surviving marker, carved in stone or preserved in a similarly

¹³ Jennifer S. Holland, 'Crossing Over: A Saxon Tomb Set for a Christian King', *National Geographic Magazine*, 'Resources', March 2005, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0503/resources_geo.html>.

durable material, detailing the name and history of the deceased. Soil evidence from Anglo-Saxon burial sites — and here I mean cemeteries that do not necessarily include high-status burials — suggests that the graves of common folk may have been identified by wooden posts; if so, the above-ground evidence rotted away long ago, leaving us with tantalizing clues but no hard evidence.¹⁴ Perhaps rotten markers were replaced with fresh posts, but the evidence from sites in use for long periods suggests that the graves were not marked permanently — or at least durably — or their location remembered accurately, so that in many cases, burials overlap where a more recent grave was dug partially on top of an existing grave. Further, not only grave markers but settlements themselves were often impermanent, abandoned because of failing pasturage, drought-stressed crops, enemy attack, disease, or a host of other social stressors.¹⁵ Whether through imperfect memory or the absence of the community, without durable markers, the burials quickly became anonymous, the dead significant to perhaps a handful of surviving kin, but even so quickly forgotten in the pressures of living. If the settlement were abandoned, all links to the living would be effaced. Onto these anonymous bones it then becomes possible to project one's own conception of the dead.

I would like to take this notion of transference of identification from the body of the deceased to the marker that commemorates the life one step further and consider that, especially in the absence of a marker that identifies those who are mourned and metonymically represents them, the lament poetry can also come to 'be' the dead, a locus for remembrance of an individual or communal life, as well as being, as we have long understood it, a more general commentary on the mutability of human experience and, as Pearson suggests of burial rites, of the mourner's understanding of place and identity. In other words, a productive way to consider Old English elegiac laments may be to think of them as replacing a physical monument to the dead, creating instead a memorial that was both portable and fungible, literally *not* carved in stone. Where a grave marker may once have stood to identify a grave and by extension that grave's occupant, when the marker rotted away, was removed, or was abandoned, what was left to commemorate the dead was not physical but textual. Remembrance is not to be found in monuments but in stories;

¹⁴ A. C. Hogarth, 'Structural Features in Anglo-Saxon Graves', *Archaeological Journal*, 130 (1973), 104–19.

¹⁵ C. Arnold and P. Wardle, 'Early Medieval Settlement Patterns in England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 25 (1981), 145–48; A. Boddington, 'Models of Burial, Settlement and Worship: The Final Phase Reviewed', in *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: A Reappraisal*, ed. by E. Southworth (Sutton: Stroud, 1990), pp. 177–99.

however, the existence of physical monuments and other artefacts adds another potential means by which to understand those stories, and the mutability of the marker echoes the mutability of the story.

Due to its originally oral nature and the vagaries both of the copying process and of performance, Old English poetry was continually subject to revision and reinterpretation by whoever was reciting or recording it, based on the perceived needs and desires of both poet and audience.¹⁶ Because of the nature of their craft, poets knew that the individual or community they re-created in their poetic remembrance was evanescent: death inexorably follows life, but so too revision inexorably follows composition. In a poem like *The Wanderer*, the anxieties of poet and narrator are multifaceted and overlapping, whether or not we understand those two as the same person: they grieve the passing of the loved ones they commemorate, they see in the transience of life their own earthly end — which prompts much of the didactic content of such laments — and they know that death is inevitable. Describing the hardships of this earthly life at the end of the poem, the narrator underscores their fragility: ‘Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne, | her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne. | Eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorpeð’ (lines 108–10)¹⁷ (Here, wealth is transitory; here a friend is transitory; here a person is transitory; here a kinsman is transitory; all the foundation of this earth becomes empty). The alliterating words in line 109, ‘mon’ (person) and ‘mæg’ (kinsman), both connote persons, as does ‘freond’ (friend) in line 108; I suggest that ‘feoh’ (wealth) in line 108 may also signify not only concrete wealth, but also a group of persons, the treasured community whose loss the Wanderer laments. The foundation of this earth, then, is not gold and gems, but community; even the items he laments at the beginning of the *ubi sunt* passage are less important in their own right than as emblems of the communal life in which his own life participates and from which it draws its meaning. Outside of that context, his own story is lamentable because it threatens to become meaningless without his friends, his kinsmen, his wealth of companions.

¹⁶ The oral versus written nature of Old English verse remains a topic of heated scholarly debate, but what is crucial here is to recognize that whether the poems were mainly transmitted by recitation or by writing, they were always in danger of revision or loss.

¹⁷ Old English quotations from *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin* are taken from *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992). Italics in Klinck indicate a manuscript emendation; all translations are my own.

According to some analytic theories of trauma and its therapeutic treatment, those who experience profound loss must at some point externalize the event through telling the story in order to heal. Like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, the narrators of the elegies are compelled to tell the tale of their losses. In her work with Holocaust survivors, Dori Laub asserts that it is only in the telling that the loss can truly be known, by the listener, certainly, but also by the victim: 'The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge [...] the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed'.¹⁸ The role of the listener requires that she 'feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony'.¹⁹ Bearing witness allows victims of trauma to know the event; however, the production of this knowledge is an event in its own right, like any verbal exchange and including the performance of poetry. The danger for the victim lies in not being truly heard or listened to, which can prompt the victim not to recall the trauma, but to continually relive it, creating a new traumatic event. Laub recalls Primo Levi's recurring nightmare in Auschwitz in which he is telling of his experience, but no one, including his sister, is listening; they behave as though he is not even there.²⁰ Levi writes, 'Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story?'.²¹ Because the Wanderer has no listener present, his traumatic loss haunts his dreams. Paradoxically, though the narrator is alone, the poet is not and sets in motion the telling to an absent audience; while it gives the Wanderer no solace — in a way, he is not a party to his own telling because he does not know that he is listened to and, according to Laub's theory, is not creating knowledge of his trauma — the poem provides readers with a space for their own testimony of loss. In reflecting on our lost loved ones, we become the witness and the Wanderer our audience: the creation of knowledge is not of his trauma but of our own. Our losses, our dead, our pain are called into being and contained in the Wanderer's account.

¹⁸ Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57–74 (p. 57). For discussions of trauma theory, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Michael Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Laub, 'Bearing Witness', p. 58.

²⁰ Laub, 'Bearing Witness', p. 68.

²¹ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (New York: Macmillan and Collier, 1961), p. 53.

Though he knows the impermanence of the lives he laments, the narrator's remembrance calls forth both friends and kin, but especially the beloved lord, to live again in his narrative. A few broad strokes of description are sufficient to re-create the lord and the relationship in what is described as a dream:

Donne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædere
 earmne anhogan oft gebindað,
 þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe ond cysse ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac. (lines 39–44)

[Often, when grief and sleep both together constrain the wretched solitary man, it seems to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his lord and lays his hands and head on his knee, just as at times previously in days of old he enjoyed the gift throne.]

Like Primo Levi's, his dream begins as an affirmation of his inclusion in community, but ends with the dissolution of even the closest of social bonds. The narrator's remembrance of a lost lord, of dead kin and companions, would have been a common occurrence in a culture continually threatened by war, famine, and disease; even without these, death from old age was inevitable. Though individual situations might vary somewhat, the lost in the poem are anonymous and could be anyone's lord, anyone's companions, anyone's kin. The sketch of these dead allows the narrator to remember, but it also allows the audience to remember, to call forth their own lost loved ones as the text conjures them from memory.

At stake, then, is the individual and social construction of memory through what Howard Williams calls 'technologies of remembrance'.²² An archaeologist, Williams focuses on the creation of memory through mortuary practices, the rites and rituals surrounding the death and burial of an individual that may be deduced from remaining physical evidence.²³ He considers two different types of memories: retrospective memories and prospective memories. Retrospective memories include both remembered and invented pasts found in personal or group biographies, genealogies, ancestors, legends, and myths; prospective memories are futures towards which survivors aspire and include desired social identity, inheritance and prosperity, group continuity, ancestral status, and fate in the afterlife. The technologies used in mortuary practice to create both types of memories include spoken words,

²² Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 33, Figure 1.9.

²³ Williams, *Death and Memory*, is careful to note that burial is not the only means by which corpses are disposed of, but it is the method on which he focuses throughout.

written words, inscriptions, images, ritual performances, artefacts, structures, monuments, landscapes, and the bodies themselves. These technologies provide a powerful language through which those who create and participate in them communicate their attitudes towards death and the dead, for themselves and for others.

Interestingly, Martin Carver has compared the symbolic role of material culture from mortuary contexts with poetry and theatre, suggesting that the performance of the burial rites and composition of the grave may share characteristics with the composition and performance of a poem.

A grave is not simply a text, but a text with attitude, a text inflated with emotion. It is not the reality behind *Beowulf*, because burial is itself not reality and is not meant to be; like poetry it is a palimpsest of allusions, constructed in a certain time and place. But the allusions themselves are so numerous and their interweft so complex, that the time and the place are the last things we can easily ascertain. It is the allusions themselves which must first be studied. In brief, burials have a language.²⁴

Like any language, the symbolism used to shape social memories is subject to both mis- and reinterpretation. Viewed in this way, material culture participates in an 'agency' that evokes, suppresses, and distributes social memories for the participants in mortuary and commemorative contexts.²⁵ Grave goods interred with the body, for example, may do all three, evoking an individual's wealth or role in life, suppressing details that are not in keeping with the desired memory, such as a perceived defect in person or character, and distributing the remembrance to any participants in the rites or viewers of the grave array before it is covered. According to Williams, 'both poetry and graves can act not only as statements in the present, but also as mnemonic performances aimed at constructing the present in relation to the past and the future'.²⁶ To continue the comparison with literary texts, memory is also a structuring principle of poetry, as the poet crafts not only the memories of his narrator, but to some extent the memories of his audience as well.

The narrator of *The Wanderer* struggles with the pain of remembrance embedded in the reality of desolation and death:

Forþan ic geþencan ne mæg geond þas woruld
forhwan *modsefa* min ne gesweorce

²⁴ Martin Carver, 'Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Tyler (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 25–48 (p. 37).

²⁵ Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), quoted from Williams, *Death and Memory*, pp. 16–17.

²⁶ Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 119.

þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence
 hu hi færlíce flet ofgeafon,
 modge maguþegnas. (lines 58–62a)

[I cannot think, therefore, why in this world my spirit does not grow dark when I ponder the life of noblemen — how suddenly they, brave warrior thanes, have yielded up the hall.]

The world he knew, centred in the fellowship of the hall, is gone, leaving him to search the world for another hall, another lord, to accept him and provide him the companions and purpose he lacks as he travels alone. Because the details are vague, these dead thanes — and the survivor who recalls them — could be any lost friends; their anonymity invites the audience members to remember their own lost comrades, to re-create their memories as a part of their personal experience, but also as a part of their shared experience as members of a community rendered incomplete by the deaths of some of its members. The narrator recounts somewhat more specifically those who have passed, more particularly what became of their bodies, but here again, the description is general enough to allow for any identification:

Sume wig fornóm,
 ferede in forðwege; sumne fugel oþbær
 ofer heanne holm; sumne se hara wulf
 deaðe gedælde; sumne dreorighleor
 in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde. (lines 80b–84)

[War took one to destruction, carried off on the way hence; one a bird bore away over the deep sea; one the grey wolf shared in death; one a sad-faced man buried in a grave in the earth.]

In this way, he says, the creator of men has laid the earth waste, depriving him of solace and companionship, a situation lamented by the Wanderer and feared by his audience, medieval and modern. The anxiety of loss creates community that transcends both time and space, as all hearers of the poem are united in their recollection and fear of personal loss and communal disintegration. Rendering the loss concrete through symbols of community, the *ubi sunt* section recalls various joys of life now gone: steed, chalice, man — the joys of community are remembered, only to be dismissed as transitory. Significantly, the specific items mentioned here are all items found in furnished graves from the seventh century. They may be indicative of the dead person's status, but interment of the person with a horse and its equipage in an adjacent pit, as in Sutton Hoo Mound 17, or with part of a horse, as in boat-grave 47 at Snape (Suffolk), where only the horse's head (with bit and harness fittings) was interred with the corpse, or with drinking vessels such as the beakers and drinking horns found in many high-status burials suggests that in the early Anglo-Saxon period there is a literal as well as figurative answer to the question: where are the steed, the chalice, the man? They are all together in the grave,

though the poet does not say so explicitly; rather, he relies on the audience to make the obvious connection. Following from this, the didactic message of the poem is clear: the wise person realizes the ephemeral nature of all these trappings of earthly life and the poet tells us that ‘Wel bið þam þe him are seceð | Frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð’ (lines 114b–115) (It will go well for the one who seeks mercy for himself, consolation from the Father in heaven, where for us all the immutable abides). Because those things that give great joy are transitory, the Wanderer exhorts his audience to seek eternal consolation elsewhere. Even the greatest of treasures, kin and companions, pass away, as evidenced by the cemeteries and other burial features that dot the landscape, reminders of death. Especially interesting in this connection, however, is what may serve as the impetus for the remembrance: ‘eald enta geweorc’ (line 87a) (ancient work of giants). Throughout the earth stand the remnants of previous settlements: wind-blown, frost-covered, snow-swept (lines 76–77a). Sight of the tumbled stones prompts the memory to reconstruct the hall in its glory, to conjure those who built and enjoyed it, lost now but still intimately connected to the physical structure: ‘Waldend licgað | dreame bidrorene; duguþ eal gecrong, | wlonc bi wealle’ (lines 78b–80a) (The rulers lie dead, deprived of joy; the veteran host fallen, proud by the wall). Not only did the Anglo-Saxons note the ancient work of giants, they also repurposed it for their own use. In later periods, stone from Roman walls was used in church construction, but in the early period, before burials gravitated to those churches and surrounding churchyards, Anglo-Saxons frequently reused prehistoric and Roman-era burial sites and monuments. In response to B. Hope-Taylor’s claim that such reuse indicates continuity at Anglo-Saxon royal palace sites such as Yeavering, Richard Bradley argues that continuity is only apparent and that the Anglo-Saxons were instead deliberately inscribing themselves into a mythical past.²⁷ While such appropriations of the past may serve to legitimize claims regarding land and resources, Williams argues that the practice more broadly involves the reworking of social memory; ‘not simply a concern for the past, but also a means of staking claims over the present and the future’.²⁸ Williams takes Nicholas Howe’s work on the literary portrayal of Anglo-Saxon landscape, which focuses on

²⁷ B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London: HMSO, 1977); Richard Bradley, ‘Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 16 (1987), 315–24 (cited in Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 181).

²⁸ Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 183.

three interwoven themes — inherited, invented, and imagined landscapes — and adds a fourth: inhabited.²⁹

According to Howe, references to ‘the ancient work of giants’ make it clear that the Anglo-Saxons were conscious of having inherited a landscape filled with material accretions from the past. Within the context of this inherited landscape, they invented new landscapes through building their own structures and imposing their own boundaries, infusing the topography with their own meanings and interpretations. Landscapes imagined in the literature include wilderness such as Grendel’s mere, the lonely sea, or the solitary path trodden by exiles. The opposite of these solitary wilds, at least in Williams’s construction, are the inhabited spaces, the places where people live or travel. Such places may contain elements of the inherited, invented, or imagined landscape and may function as a mnemonic focus for social memory.³⁰ In the case of the Wanderer, the shattered wall becomes an occasion for remembrance as the narrator returns to the image of a surviving wall to remind him, and thereby his audience, of those dear ones he mourns: ‘Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe | weal wundrum heah, wyrmlicum fah’ (lines 97–98) (Now in the trace of the dear retinue a wall stands wondrously high, adorned with serpentine shapes). Whether or not this is a remnant of his own hall — and it likely is not, given that he suggests that he is far from home — the artefact recalls to mind the Wanderer’s lost companions, which in turn prompts the memory of the audience’s own lost companions. The poem, then, becomes a space in which the audience can grieve its own losses, even (or especially) as it recognizes the impermanence of the joys shared with friends and kin in the hall, in battle, in the living of life itself.

That such architectural remains can stir reflection in both the society that built the structures and the audience that imagines them is perhaps most obvious in *The Ruin*. Itself a fragment of cultural history, *The Ruin* invites modern readers to imagine the contents of the missing lines of the poem, adding another layer to the imaginings possible in a text that both recalls and reinvents time past. Though perhaps less overtly didactic, at least in the surviving lines, *The Ruin* points the contrast between time past, when the old work of giants was intact, the present time of the narrator who muses on the ruins, and the present time of the audience

²⁹ Nicholas Howe, ‘The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, Inherited, Invented, Imagined’, in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, ed. by J. Howe and M. Wolfe (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002), pp. 91–112 (cited in Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 20). See also Howe, ‘An Angle on this Earth: Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 82 (2000), 1–25.

³⁰ Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 207.

who through the text imagine the fallen stones the narrator describes while simultaneously calling to mind similar ruins they may themselves have seen. So strong is this tendency to try to locate the ruin in memory and a familiar place, some have been tempted to identify the ruins described in the poem with the Roman ruins of Aquae Sulis (Bath). Here again the description of the physical ruin recalls those who built the stone structures, lamenting their passing and — less explicitly here than in *The Wanderer* — the inevitability of our own. The stone wall is described as ‘wondrous’, broken by the fates; even the work of giants is subject to ruin and decay, with fallen roofs and towers. Frost hangs on the gates, the remains of buildings, testament to their utter destruction and lifelessness, echoing the loss of those who built them, now buried and forgotten, memorialized only by the physical remains of their community, their stories lost. In the midst of decay, however, the wall stands unmoved, stained and covered with lichen, open to the elements, surviving still, though generations and kingdoms come and go. The narrator moves from his view of the decaying wall to imagining its former glory and with it, the glory of its builders: a bright city filled with comfort and companionship until cruel fate steps in. War and pestilence overtake the folk, who die and are buried, and the structures that gave them protection are laid waste:

Brosnade burgsteall, betend crungon,
 hergas to hrusan. Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,
 ond þas teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð,
brostbeames rof. Hryre wong gecrong,
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig,
 glædmod ond goldbeorht, gleoma *gefrætweð*,
 wlonc ond wingal, wighyrstum scan;
 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
 on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices. (lines 28–37)

[The guardians, the armies fell to the earth. Therefore the buildings grow desolate, and this red-curved roof of the vault splits from the tiles. The ruin has fallen to the ground, broken into rubble heaps, where of old many a man happy and bright with gold adorned himself with splendour, proud and flushed with wine he shone in his war trappings; he gazed on treasure, on silver, on precious stones, on wealth, on possessions, on jewelry, on that bright stronghold of a broad kingdom.]

Here again, the items mentioned are all common artefacts found in Anglo-Saxon graves: ornaments used to adorn the body, often made of silver, gold, and gemstones; war gear such as helmets, spears, swords, shields, and other items — personal and communal treasures. Such artefacts were used in mortuary practice to create a narrative for the deceased; further, the items themselves often have biographies, so that they signify both wealth and social connections, such as those between kin or

between a lord and his retainers.³¹ In *Beowulf*, swords such as Nægling and Hrunting or the Brosinga necklace are artefacts with their own histories, and their exchanges between persons help both to create and to signify the cohesion of the society. On a much smaller scale, gifts such as small jewels or items of adornment that may have been exchanged between close family members also have significance; even utilitarian items such as combs or cups may have stories, lost to us, that testified to the deceased's place within a family or the larger community. The poet's preoccupation, however, is not with the individual items themselves, but with the moral they point: all become useless and meaningless when death comes.

Perhaps, as S. A. J. Bradley remarks, *The Ruin*, like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, 'dwells on the details of the world's decline in order to move its audience to seek the point-for-point reciprocal majesty, security and stability of the heavenly Jerusalem where earthly yearnings for noble fellowship and matching dignity of environment are fulfilled, free from the world's mutability'.³² Indeed, Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson point out that, so common is the Anglo-Saxon proclivity for such reflection, Old English had a separate word for it, *dustsceawung* 'contemplation of the dust'.³³ The ruin described in the poem is clearly meant, like the tumbled walls in *The Wanderer*, as a metonymic reminder of those who inhabited the buildings, partially as an exhortation to the audience to think on mortality and the inexorability of death, to prepare for eternity, and to remember lost friends and family. In this way, the poem provides a space to think of the dead that is both personal and impersonal. The fallen stones of the ruin also recall the bones of the human body, an image that is both intimate and remote. Just as the hall was once alive with the song and laughter of warriors now long departed, the individual body, now animated by a living spirit, will one day fall to dust. Not only will we die like the builders of the ruin, we will decay like the ruin itself: 'broken, fallen, undermined by old age', where once we shared all the joys of this life.

Similarly, although the focus of *The Seafarer* is initially on the narrator — intent on telling his own story, he neglects the stories of others to a certain extent — that focus shifts to a discussion of the joys of life now fled that especially recalls

³¹ Williams, *Death and Memory*, pp. 30, 36–78.

³² *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. and ed. by S. A. J. Bradley (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), p. 401.

³³ Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 6th edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 253. See also Edward B. Irving, Jr, 'Image and Meaning in the Elegies', in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. by Robert P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), pp. 153–66 (p. 159); Irving here connects the Old English notion of *dustsceawung* with a tradition stretching back to the 'house of dust' that Enkidu reports seeing in *Gilgamesh*.

The Wanderer. His situation, isolated on the sea, causes him to reflect on the passage of time, the loss of earthly joys, and impending death. No matter how pleasant a life a man has on this earth, eventually, ‘yldo him on fareð, onsyn blacað, | gomelfeax gnornað; wat his iuwine, | æþelinga bearn eorþan forgiefene’ (lines 91–93) (Old age overtakes him, his face grows pale, grey-haired he mourns, knows that his former friends, the sons of princes, have been committed to the earth). Like the narrator of *The Wanderer*, this speaker recalls that which is lost in order to set a lesser value on it than on eternal things of the spirit; also like the Wanderer, he couches his argument in terms of mortuary practice, remarking that even if a man wishes to bury his kinsman with gold and other treasures, those costly items are insufficient to assist at the Last Judgement if his kinsman’s soul is corrupt. Earthly goods, earthly joys — all will pass away, just as all people pass away, and God will not be swayed by the richness of a burial array.

With regard to the inefficacy of treasure, one of the most poignant laments in Old English poetry is the so-called ‘Lay of the Last Survivor,’ which appears in *Beowulf*, lines 2244–56. The speaker is the last surviving member of the race of folk who amassed the treasure now guarded by the dragon that will ultimately be Beowulf’s undoing. From the survivor’s speech, it is clear that his people had enjoyed the treasure he has hidden in the barrow, and equally clear that he would sacrifice all of it to have his companions back again. Told before Beowulf’s fight with the dragon, this story foreshadows Wiglaf’s grief at the loss of his king and the inadequacy of any earthly treasure to compensate for that loss. The survivor recalls how the gold first came from the earth and is now returning to it; though he does not explicitly say so, the more important treasure that has been returned to the dust from whence it came is his band of companions who lay dead and buried, leaving him alone to mourn them as he recalls former joys in the hall. Even the treasure, like the bodies of his comrades, will decay:

Sceal se hearda helm (hyr)stedgolde,
 fætum befeallen; feormynd swefað,
 þa ðe beadogriman bywan sceoldon;
 ge swylce seo herepad, sio æt hilde gebad
 ofer borda gebræc bite irena,
 broснаð æfter beorne.³⁴ (lines 2255–60a)

[The strong helm must be deprived of its fairly wrought gold, its gold plating; the craftsmen sleep in death, those who should adorn the war-mask; and just so the coat of mail, which experienced the crashing bite of iron across shields in battle.]

³⁴ *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by Fr. Klaeber, 3rd edn (Lexington: Heath, 1950).

Here, the artefacts recall his lost friends and kin and give the survivor an endless prompt towards reflection and grief. Because he feels compelled to stand guard over the treasure, even though no one is left to inherit or use it, he is never separated from the reminder of his loss and therefore can never know joy again. Further, the fact that the treasure is buried in a barrow, as is the hero, invites comparison with the treasures buried therein.

Although *Widsith* is not a lament, the recollection of encounters long past in the poem has to it the quality of a roll call of the dead, almost like a virtual cemetery tour in which the graves of the notables buried therein are remarked and in some cases their stories told. Certainly the recounting of the people the narrator has known calls them into being for the audience. In some instances, the narrator is content merely to list those he has met; in other cases, he details the encounter as it affected his own life:

Ond ic wæs mid Eormanrice ealle þrage,
 þær me Gotena cyning gode dohte;
 se me beag forgeaf, burgwarena fruma,
 on þam siex hund wæs smættes goldes,
 gescyred sceatta scillingrime;
 þone ic Eadgilse on æht sealed,
 minum hleodryhtne, þa ic to ham bicom,
 leofum to leane, þæs þe he me lond forgeaf,
 mines fæder eþel, frea Myrginga. (lines 88–96)

[I was with Eormanric for quite a while, where the king of the Goths was graciously kind to me. He, the ruler of the city-dwellers, gave me a collar in which there was six hundred coins' worth of pure gold, counted by shillings. This I gave to Eadgils, my lord and protector, to keep when I arrived home as a reward to the beloved man because he, the lord of the Myrgingas, gave me land, the ancestral home of my father.]

Here the poet/narrator re-creates the king of the Goths as a generous patron, as evidenced by the gift of the collar; he also creates himself as a loyal retainer to Eadgils, his own lord, to whom he passes the collar in acknowledgement for a gift of land when he arrives home. The story of the necklace is inextricably woven into the fabric of his life as it demonstrates his relationships with Eormanric and Eadgils; the necklace is far more than simply an item of great value, for it symbolizes something of even greater value — the narrator's social network, especially his relationship with his lord, Eadgils. Even when the speaker was not himself involved in the action he recounts, he tells the stories of some he encountered: Offa, Hrothwulf, Hrothgar, Ælfwine, and others. Like grave goods from far-flung places that may serve, among other things, to demonstrate the deceased's connections beyond his or her local community, these stories expand the narrator's repertoire and enrich the narrative of his own life. For the audience, the stories about these men

become the men themselves, for the stories are the only experience we can have of them, just as laments for the dead we never knew must stand for them and, for us at least, become them.

To return for a moment to Pearson's discussion of death and burial practices, he suggests that the burial is the final opportunity for the community of the living to fix the memory of the deceased, to create the person who will be remembered as they wish to remember her.³⁵ This creation is achieved in a number of ways, though for our purposes a brief discussion of practices attaching to inhumation will suffice. The positioning, dressing, and adornment of the body often signifies status, whether measured by wealth, ancestry, influence, martial prowess, or other criteria. Grave goods in the burial add to the shaping of the character of the dead, and while they may tell us more about the living who include them than they do about the person buried with them, they also give clues as to how the living community chooses to remember the dead: which traits they ignore or gloss over, which they emphasize and celebrate.³⁶ While we cannot recover firsthand whatever ceremony or ritual may have accompanied early Anglo-Saxon interments, pagan or Christian, we do have clues from excavated remains as to how those who buried them wished the dead to be remembered, although interpretation of the artefacts is far from straightforward. For example, the rich burial of a woman like the one at Swallowcliffe Down may indicate her personal wealth and status, or it may indicate the wealth and power of her husband or extended kinship group.³⁷ Certainly those who buried her knew the significance of the grave goods and other details of the burial, but at this distance, we can only speculate. Even so, what is important for this discussion is the manipulation of the circumstances of burial in order to create a persona for the dead individual.

Interestingly, according to Pearson, the dead are ritually remembered in order to be ritually forgotten. In some cultures, which he unfortunately does not name, persons who carry the body of the dead to its grave are literally tied to it with twine or rope; when they reach the grave, those ties are cut and the body buried.³⁸ As symbolic participation in this severance, mourners following the procession carry with them sharp blades to cut their own figurative ties with the deceased. In twenty-first century Western culture, at 'memorial services', 'celebrations of the

³⁵ Pearson, *Archaeology of Death and Burial*, p. 9.

³⁶ Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 40.

³⁷ For a discussion of the artefacts from the site, see Williams, *Death and Memory*, pp. 28–30.

³⁸ Pearson, *Archaeology of Death and Burial*, p. 25.

life', 'services of remembrance', or a host of variously named ceremonies, the opportunity for remembering and celebrating the dead is often followed by similar rituals of forgetting. Modern funerary customs vary widely, but can involve a number of practices that demonstrate connection with the dead, but, finally and more powerfully, demonstrate severance from them: the laying of flowers in or near the grave, or throwing dirt into the grave to ritually begin covering the deceased and mark the final separation between mourned and mourner. As Pearson argues, the dead are then ritually forgotten as their bodies are interred or otherwise obscured from view; for the living who remain, the act of remembering requires the act of forgetting. I wish to suggest that a goal of Old English laments is not only perpetually to remember that which is lost and thereby provide an earthly value against which continually to judge immutable heavenly rewards, as the narrators encourage us to do. To use Laub's notions of testimony, they also enable the audience to re-create the loss of companions through memory; the experience of knowing again then allows us to forget those lost companions, albeit briefly, in order to focus on the business of living. The Last Survivor's tragedy is not only that he has lost all of his companions, but also that he is perpetually reminded of them as he stands guard over the treasures they have left, continually reliving the trauma of his loss and isolation. We do not know exactly what type of ritual accompanied Anglo-Saxon burials, especially pre-Christian burials, but even without specific information, we can conjecture that the recalling of dead companions post-burial functioned for participants much the same then as now. Like any other ritual act of remembering, the recitation of laments for the lost re-creates that which — and those who — have gone beyond mortal ken. Further, one could argue that each re-creation of the lost conjured through the recitation of a lament is subtly different from all others, with the personae thus created morphing over time in response to each unique utterance. In this way, the dead are not simply re-created as texts, they are re-created as texts that can be revised: not just 'seen again' but 'envisioned differently'.

In fact, a large measure of the anxiety inherent in lament for the poet/narrator lies in the cognizance that he ultimately lacks control, not only over the story he tells, but more profoundly over the story he lives. The poems he composes and the narrative of his life are impermanent; once he is dead, the poet's verse may be revised, which is natural enough, but so, too, may his very life. That poetry is inevitably altered in performance and in reception is a commonplace of criticism; that the stories we tell about people shape our concept of them is also more or less a given in contemporary scholarship. A danger for us is always that we will read backwards our own theories of how narrative shapes perception and assume that the Anglo-Saxon poets understood text in the same ways we do. Such an assumption would be misguided and misleading, but I am suggesting that the Anglo-

Saxons, especially the poets, understood the power of text to embody those who were lost through distance and especially through death, that they also understood the mutability of such texts — the literal artefact of the poem itself and the life recounted therein — and that at least part of that understanding derived from their funerary practices and from the originally oral nature of their literature.

I have argued that Old English lament serves as an attempt to retain or recapture or reincarnate the absent beloved as a text, potentially immutable and immortal, to serve as a locus for, and containment of, overwhelming grief. In part, the Christian insistence on the Word made flesh may have strengthened the impulse, already ancient in classical literatures, to preserve memory of the physical by means of text. The enterprise is doomed to failure, however, because no text can fully capture the whole of a person, but more because both memory and text are themselves as mutable and transient as the lost one they wish to commemorate. Perhaps the realization of that transience lies at the heart of both ritual remembering and ritual forgetting. Through our recollections we call the lost into being again, though such reincarnation always comes with a risk: if the memory refuses to be contained, the grief to be mastered, the survivor may fall into despair. As Dori Laub remarks regarding therapy for Holocaust victims, '[T]o allow the psychoanalytic process of evolving knowledge to be set in motion, a place that is safe and safeguarded by human presence has to be created'.³⁹ The inhabited landscape of Anglo-Saxon England is indeed safeguarded by human presence — past, present, and future — as the living come to terms with their losses and create the narratives that recall them and render them bearable. Laub warns of the hazards of listening to trauma, of participating in the creation of the knowledge of loss: 'Trauma — and its impact on the hearer — leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact. As one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself; and that is not a simple task. The survival experience, or the Holocaust experience, is a very condensed version of most of what life is all about: it contains a great many existential questions, that we manage to avoid in our daily living, often through preoccupation with trivia.'⁴⁰ By creating safe spaces in which we are both survivor and listener, the laments allow us to remember the lost, to grapple with those questions and our own grief, by containing them in and confining them to a text, so that ultimately we may set our pain aside and resume the business of living. That, in the end, is why the Wanderer's spirit does not grow dark.

³⁹ Laub, 'Bearing Witness', p. 69.

⁴⁰ Laub, 'Bearing Witness', p. 72.

THE GRAVE, THE SWORD, AND THE LAMENT: MOURNING FOR THE FUTURE IN *BEOWULF*

Anne Savage

Archaeological description is precisely [...] an abandonment of the history of ideas, a systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures, an attempt to practise a quite different history of what men have said. That some people do not recognize in this enterprise the history of their own childhood, that they mourn its passing, and continue to invoke, in an age that is no longer made for it, that great shade of former times, certainly proves their fidelity.¹

Many ways in which loss leads to mourning and mourning to formal poetic lament are familiar to readers of *Beowulf*: not only have we observed the grief of characters there, but we have ourselves mourned, often very formally through our scholarship, the lost information about the poem, how it was composed, what its original audiences thought about it, and, not least, its real embodiment as an oral performance, now only to be speculatively re-created. The manuscript has been viewed, reproduced, contemplated under different kinds of light, producing readings on which we still do not agree. *Beowulf* refers so often to grief and loss, to their reconstruction in poems and the ways in which these are received by audiences, that I feel the loss of this knowledge again every time I read it. Foucault's comment posits that our rereading of ancient objects is by nature different from our understanding of ideas and their history. Perhaps the materiality of these uncovered things compels a more instinctive response initiated by physical contact, which links us with a past we can no longer reach; this almost-presence itself can both freshen mourning anew and teach the bereaved to accept and

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972; repr. London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 154–55.

assimilate their loss. Foucault's connection between archaeology and mourning first leads to some observations on Anglo-Saxon burial practices concerning objects inhumed with the dead, and the emphasis on viewing those objects, along with the body. Helen Geake reminds us that the climactic moment of the early Anglo-Saxon funeral

seems to have been the viewing of the tableau; the body laid out in the grave or on the pyre, with its jewellery or weapons and other accoutrements. To achieve the correct tableau, with the uniform patterning observed by the archaeologist, the task of laying the body out had to be deliberately and carefully performed.²

Otherwise there would be no pattern left to observe: all the objects would slip out of place as the body was lowered into the ground during burial. While cremation leaves no such pattern, because goods and bones are taken from the ashes, and other goods added, and buried in a pot, the laying out with goods was done on the pyre in tableau also.

The materiality of grave-goods insists on a concrete link with what is not known. Where has the person 'gone'? These objects, from this present, will 'go there' in some fashion, too, even if the departure is into the symbolic realm. Is the dead person still himself, or herself? Yes, here are the objects owned and used by him or her, and here are our gifts which define that individual through our giving. Here is a composition which tells the story of individuals in this life, as well as their final destination.

The complexity of the tableau is well illustrated by Martin Carver's interpretation of the Sutton Hoo ship burial as, in effect, a series of portrayals of the dead man in different aspects.³ It begins with a working vessel, 'the longest ship so far known from Europe before the Viking era',⁴ on the deck of which was constructed a burial chamber, a room amply furnished (beginning with objects hung on the west wall) with a hundred-litre cauldron, two smaller ones and a food tub, an axe-hammer, and some tar; the dead man is provisioned for his voyage. A nine-foot by three-foot by three-foot coffin contained the body, and some of his personal objects lay at his feet. Two other heaps were then added: furthest from the feet were

² Helen Geake, 'The Control of Burial Practice in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (York: York University Press, 2003), pp. 259–69.

³ Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 123–27.

⁴ Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 123.

a garment, a cup, two hanging bowls, a wooden bowl, and a down pillow in a case. A pair of shoes was set on each side of that heap. Between this and the first heap lay a mail coat on folded cloth, with 'many coils of tape, perhaps for fastening garments. Here a flower was laid'.⁵ These two heaps were covered by a third, composed of more garments, buckles and toiletries, a ladle of silver, textile fragments, and a hat made out of otter fur. Finally, covering this pile was a studded leather object which might have been a bag, and a yellow cloak.

Now it was time to say goodbye to the person as an individual and replace the coffin lid, hammering down ten cleats on each side to secure it. But outside and on top of the coffin, the celebration of the person as a statesman was to continue.⁶ Two more yellow cloaks were laid on the coffin, and at the east end of the body, on the second cloak, was the large silver dish imported from Constantinople, familiar to many of us from photos or the British Museum, with food and offerings which had been burnt. At the coffin's centre were wooden drinking bottles and carefully wrapped large drinking horns, followed further to the west by a spear along each of the two coffin edges. Within the space outlined by these lay a baldric with the coin purse and its thirty pieces (all from different mints) and a sword with woollen scabbard, both ornamented with gold and cut garnets. Finally, here was the nest of silver bowls, two silver spoons, the helmet, gaming pieces, and a collar with a bell (Carver suggests it might have been for a pet). On the east wall were the shield, the lyre in its beaverskin bag, a large hanging bowl, five spears, and three pike-like weapons set through the handle of a Coptic bowl from Africa. More objects were set on the floor, including a lamp with a cake of wax for fuel. There was enough space for observers to stand, walk around, and view the tableau.

Carver comments, 'many and varied were the objects assembled in this chamber, and the references suggested by them are diverse and complex and operate at many levels in the mind, then and now'.⁷ Through these objects we have seen the man as warrior and host, well-dressed and well-groomed; and also as a seafarer with tools for fixing his ship, his burial chamber a cabin on deck. Carver notes:

It was a huge investment, suggesting deep feeling, and bringing forth, from the burial party and its sponsors, a composition that tries to express the fundamentals of loss and hope. In short, the burial is itself a poem, full of references that are interlaced with each other: references to life in the hall, to how a ship is stowed, to the status of the dead person, in

⁵ Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 125.

⁶ Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 125.

⁷ Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 127.

reality or aspiration, and at a more personal level to the foibles and achievements of the individual.⁸

Carver's consideration of these tableaux as poems leads now to a consideration of the funeral tableaux in *Beowulf*.

While these practices changed over the Anglo-Saxon period in the presence of Christianity, and were abandoned altogether in the eighth century,⁹ the makers of *The Seafarer* and *Beowulf* are clearly aware of them through the continuity of poetry in the Germanic world, and perhaps the continuing practices of their non-Christian Germanic neighbours.¹⁰ In this contemplation of mourning in one poem I will consider the ways in which objects link human beings to the dead, reading *Beowulf* as a verbal artefact of art and grief, linking the present with the past, while also marking a boundary we cannot cross. The poem stands, still, as a monument to the dead in the maker's own time, as well as in the Germanic pre-Christian past. Because so much Anglo-Saxon poetic grief for the dead in this poem and some others is focused on human artefacts — swords, helmets, mail, golden goblets, rings, and buildings — I will also consider their role in the poem as lament.¹¹ Scyld's funeral begins within the first thirty lines, and *Beowulf*'s ends the poem; both are a tribute to the dead in gold and mourning, the disposal of the body, and a reference to the future.

The killings of two sons in the poem are, like the funerals of Scyld and *Beowulf*, counterbalanced moments of death and mourning which define the extremes of parental responses: in the first half of the poem, the mother's grief over Grendel's death at the hands of the hero; and, in the second, Hreðel's over the death of one

⁸ Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, p. 129.

⁹ Geake, 'Control of Burial Practice', pp. 260–61.

¹⁰ Gale R. Owen-Crocker, in *The Four Funerals in Beowulf and the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), also looks at the structure of *Beowulf* through the insights of archaeology. Her consideration of Germanic funeral practices links the perspective of the poem to specific times and cultures, while proposing that pre-Christian elements have been purged; she reads the poem as a distinctly Christianized reconstruction of earlier funeral practices. I focus instead on Carver's comments about the necessity of *viewing* the dead as a communal exercise of mourning with a view to closure, while I extend my analysis to the paradoxes and ironies presented by these viewings — both for the characters in the poem and the audiences of the poem — and how those characterize the poem as a lament in itself. Quotations are from George Jack's *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹¹ See, for example, *The Wanderer*, from line 29 to the end; *The Ruin* (*The Exeter Book*, ed. by George P. Krapp and Elliott Van K. Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936)).

Killing a person who does too much harm to the community, as Grendel does, is the last resort after negotiation for compensation has failed:

[He intended no peace with any man of Danish kin, to put aside the murder, to negotiate a fee.]

¹² Andrew Reynolds notes, 'Decapitations from the Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries, however, are characterised by untidy, and in many cases excessively violent beheading from behind, probably with a sword. Blows intended for the back of the neck were delivered with far from clinical precision, to points anywhere from the shoulder blades to the top of the head [...]. Execution victims were commonly buried in twos and threes implying contemporary execution, but in general little care was taken with the burials of wrongdoers, with no apparent concern for grave orientation, and the minimum effort invested in the digging of the graves.' 'Executions and Hard Anglo-Saxon Justice', *British Archaeology*, 31 (1998), available online at <<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba>>.

In stark contrast to the mere-mother, Hreðel demands neither legal wergild nor vengeance:

þæt wæs feohleas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,
hreðre hygemeðe; sceolde hwæðre swa þeah
æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan. (lines 2441–43)

[That was a fee-less fight, criminally committed, wearying to the spirit; but one nobleman had to lose his life unavenged.]

The thematic image which unites the contrasting moments of vengeance and painful self-restraint is the old man positioned at the foot of the gallows, grieving over his son's execution, resigned to sorrow:

Swa biþ geomorlic gomelum ceorle
to gebidanne þæt his byre ride
giong on galgan; þonne he gyd wrece,
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
hrefne to hroðre, ond he him help[e] ne maeg. (lines 2444–48)

[So it is sad when an old man has to endure his young son's ride on the gallows; then he crafts a lament, a painful song, when his son hangs pleasuring the raven, and he cannot help him.]

He contemplates the emptiness of his son's house, how it seems the entire land is empty, and the poem moves into a universalized lament for the dead:

ridend swefað,
hæled in hoðman; nis þære hearpan sweg,
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron. (lines 2457b–59)

[The riders sleep, heroes in a hidden place; there is no play of the harp, no joy in the lands, as there used to be.]

So the death of one brings to mind the death of all, but without the surges of vengeful passion which elsewhere in the poem continue the destruction of lives through vengeance. In fact, the resonance of 'æðeling unwrecen' (unavenged nobleman) with 'gyd wrece' (crafts a lament) points to the resignation of the grieving parent to suffering the pain of loss, as he turns to skill in words rather than the sword.

The poem presents Grendel, by contrast, as a force of (human) nature which seeks violence with a kind of hunger, and rejoices in killing:

Wiht unhælo,
grim ond grædig, gearo sona wæs,
reoc ond reþe, ond on ræste genam
þritig þegna; þanon eft gewat

huðe hremig to ham faran,
mid þære wælfylle wica neosan. (lines 120b–25)

[The unholy being, grim and greedy, was ready right away, fierce and cruel, and seized from their beds thirty thanes; from there he went travelling home, rejoicing in his plunder, with an abundance of slaughter seeking out his house.]

Although he has had his fill, he returns the very next night without remorse:

Næs hit lengra fyrst,
ac ymb ane niht eft gefremede
morðbeala mare, ond no mearn fore,
fehðe ond fyrene; was to fæst on þam. (lines 134b–37)

[Nor was it a longer time than one night when he did more murder, and was not sorry for it, the hostilities and crimes; he was too fixed on them.]

Grendel's mother's grief, like Grendel's persecution of Hrothgar's people, is excessive and wilful, refusing to accede to the principles limiting harm by the death of a murderer, just as Grendel had no inclination to regret or pay for his crimes; like a serial killer, he is 'fixed' on them. Grendel's mother casts a long shadow through the poem in the form of human beings who destroy peace in the name of vengeance, while the spirit of Grendel lives on too in human greed and rage. The sad voice of the 'Last Survivor' testifies to violence which ends only when there is nobody left to kill.

The cycle of death and vengeance is repeatedly linked with the material greed of kings who plunder other kingdoms. The funeral mound created for Beowulf contains the objects removed from one genocidal grave to what amounts to another, since the Geats are soon to follow them: Wiglaf's summary of past conflicts in Hreðel's and Hygelac's reigns lead to grim predictions of war with the Swedes in the near future, now that the Geats are unprotected by their lord: 'Wæs sio swatswaðu Sweona ond Geata, | wælræs weora wide gesyne' (lines 2946–47) (The bloody trail of Swedes and Geats, of deadly strokes by men, was seen everywhere). The gold, which Beowulf fought to gain for his people's enrichment, will be burnt in his pyre. Wiglaf's picture of the future contrasts painfully with an imagined 'otherwise, if our lord had lived, we might have lived'. This is ironically reminiscent of the *ubi sunt* passages in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, but with the foreboding knowledge of where his people will go, along with so many others: into the pyre, or exile, or slavery in a foreign land, without gold, or laughter, or any of the things which make life good — except for the carrion-eaters after a battle (lines 3010–29). The woman's song at the pyre of the king follows soon after, lamenting his death and their future:

sæ[d]e geneahhe
 þæt hio hyre [here]g[a]ngas hearde ond[r]ede,
 wælfylle worn, *werudes* egesan,
 hy[n]ðo ond hæf[t]nyd. (lines 3152b–55a)

[She said again and again that she feared terribly the troops of war, the many slaughters, the terror of armies, humiliation and slavery.]

As the king is reduced to ashes, the future of the Geats disappears: ‘Heofon rece swealg’ (line 3155b) (The sky swallowed the smoke).

So mourning is tied to the loss of the next generation, as well as the last: the mother or father’s own life will not continue in the form of the child when the parent is dead, nor further into a distant future through grandchildren and great-grandchildren; on the tribal scale, the people itself will disappear like the Last Survivor’s people, and like the Geats will. Grendel’s mother has lost her murderous only child. Hreðel has suffered the death of one son at the hands of the other. While genealogies ideally link the generations, there are times when genealogy ends and lament takes its place: this applies to the world in which Beowulf was made, as well as to the world made in it.

Surging through the poem, in between the two extremes represented by Grendel’s mother and Hreðel, are the feuds and wars which strike down young men and leave their families grieving. Most emblematic are the Finnsburh Episode, told in a fleeting moment of stability at Heorot, and, later, Beowulf’s insights on the likely shattering of the alliance between the Danes and Heathobards (lines 2022–69). Embedded in each of these stories, one past and one future, is the image of a significant sword and the effects of seeing it on men susceptible to a desire for vengeance. In the first, a feud has been resumed after the marriage which was to cement the peace; a truce is made, the dead cremated and mourned in both time-frames, that of the song in Heorot and of the poem’s audience. But the words of lament follow a grisly view of the pyre containing Hildeburh’s son and brother:

Hafelon multon,
 bengeato burston ðonne blod ætspranc,
 laðbite lices. Lig eal forswealg,
 gæsta gifrost, þara ðe guð fornam
 bega folces; wæs hira blæd scacen. (lines 1120b–24)

[Heads melted, wounds burst when blood surged out, hate-bites on the body. Flame swallowed all, greediest spirit, all of those whom war seized from both peoples. Their glory was gone.]

But the sword Hunlafing, when laid in Hengest’s lap, causes the truce to be broken (lines 1142–45), the marriage ended in two bouts of carnage, and the widow taken

back, leaving her son, husband, and brother dead in the hostilities. In the second narrative focussing on a sword, Beowulf imagines that the truce affirmed by Freawaru's marriage to the 'gladum suna Frodan' (line 2025) (glad son of Froda) will be broken when an old man incites a younger to look at the sword taken from his dead father on the battlefield, where it hangs at the side of a former enemy (lines 2041–66).

An awareness of the funerary tableau sits uneasily at the margin of these episodes: Hildeburh laments as the bodies of her brother and son burn, and after the truce is broken, more are killed; what kind of layings-out can these have been? No matter how skilfully composed or well-furnished the tableau, viewing the dead can have brought no comfort to anyone. In Beowulf's predicted scenario for Freawaru's marriage, one set of the dead have been buried and the truce made, but another set will follow when that truce, too, is broken.

The sword as object, the great artefact of Germanic 'heroic' culture, is both the protector of the people and the destroyer of the people. If we compare some of the funerary tableaux in which swords are placed, we see great differences: Scyld dies after a long life of keeping his enemies at bay and in awe, and the death-boat is piled high with treasure including weapons and war-gear (lines 26–52). He is returned across the great divide between life and death with 'no less treasure' than he brought to his people at the beginning; the pace of the laying-out is stately: his beloved companions carry the body to the shore, he is laid on the breast of the ship, one composition of treasure after another is arranged around him, and the ship sets off across the sea. He leaves behind him a dynasty — Beowulf of the Scyldings — who produces in turn another generation. The audience of the poem is invited to behold the treasures laid in the ship with the body. This is surely the life of the sword at its best, that it should come into being in the warrior-king's hand as a weapon to enforce peace and finally return with him in the funerary pyre or ship to the earth or sea, eventually reaching its destination with the approving gods. A golden standard is set over his head, and Scyld's glory sets rather than dies. His body, in the funerary tableau as the poem presents it, travels back through memory into the territory of his mythical origins (lines 28–46):

Nalæs hi hyne læssan lacum teodan,
 þeodgestreonum, þon þa dydon
 þe hine æt frumsceaft forð onsendon
 ænne ofer yðe umborwesende. (lines 43–46)

[They adorned him with no fewer gifts, lordly treasures, than those who sent him forth at the beginning, alone over the waves, a child.]

The perspective then returns to his power over the present he leaves behind: ‘þa gyt hie him asetton segen g[y]ldenne’ (line 47) (Then further, they set over him a golden standard). This scene and this moment lead into the future of the rest of the poem through dynastic genealogy: Scyld’s son Beowulf at the beginning of the poem (line 53) eventually brings about his descendant’s building of Heorot, to which the young Beowulf of the Geats comes to rescue the Danes.

In contrast, the materials for Beowulf’s funeral had already been laid in despair by the Last Survivor for his entire people destroyed by war; his lament for them, from the perspective of the funerary tableau, contemplates the fate of all the precious objects without human beings to use and care for them: swords, armour, helmets, goblets — all as dead as their people. There is no one alive to behold it but himself, and he dies along with the rest (lines 2236–70). When, at Beowulf’s request to see the treasure, Wiglaf hurriedly brings a pile of random precious objects to his lord, he hopes to arrive before his lord dies. Beowulf offers gratitude for the gold to give his people, and satisfaction with his life; but he is unable to pass it on to a son, and Wiglaf is the last of his own kin, the Wægmundings. By the end of the poem they are fully identified with the now-nameless people of the dragon’s mound, and the old woman lamenting Beowulf’s death at his pyre fears that such will be the fate of the Geats as well: war and slavery, death and dispersal. In such conditions, who will lay *them* out? Beowulf, like Scyld, is given a golden standard, which Wiglaf brings hastily from the mass grave of the unknown people — a symbol of Beowulf’s victory and also of his people’s defeat by war and time, their journey out of all memory. Ultimately the world of Scyld, inherited first by Beowulf of the Scyldings and finally by Beowulf of the Geats, will be effaced, represented only by the mound on the headland — and by the poem.

There is a sense in which the poem takes us on a journey around the burial mound in the late Germanic world from a late Anglo-Saxon perspective, ultimately highlighting the ways in which the most horrific kinds of death by violence preclude or interrupt the ceremonies of laying a body to rest, and all that those ceremonies represent. At the core of the human dilemma is the force represented by Cain through Grendel: the inability to control vindictive rage, the desire to strike down your own flesh and blood. Grendel devours his helpless victims, who as a result can never be a part of their own laying-out; their imagined remains lie among the ancient treasures under the mere, like the giant sword whose blade melts in Beowulf’s hand after he severs Grendel’s head, the sword whose hilt bears the written history of ancient and continuous strife against God. Swords cannot kill Grendel, nor can they rid the human spirit of its murderous impulses. While the peoples, names, and genealogies are erected in the poem as historical links through human flesh and blood, there are too many funeral tableaux laid out in painful

irony after family killings, or attenuated by haste after or before genocidal war, for the viewing of the dead and grave-goods by the living to comfort the viewers with a sense of honour done to the dead, or any sense of afterlife or hope for the future.

These extended tableaux, and the different implications of the grave-goods — the different directions in which these implications go, towards death as continuity versus death as end — are still enticing us to look at them. By this I mean that our presence in an unforeseen audience of *Beowulf* places us, however familiar or foreign we may feel, among the mourners at the pyres who have looked carefully at the dead and contemplated their laying-out. In the contemplation of the dead at a funeral, past, poetically constructed, or present, interpretations and philosophies are constructed freely by those who look; but this simple act of viewing is their source. We have seen the swords in the hands of men who brought about these funerals, and swords in the mound which forms the grave of the Last Survivor's entire tribe; there was the giant sword in the mere-hall which served also as Grendel's grave and his mother's, and we witnessed Hrothgar reading the story of ancient strife on its burnt-out hilt.

The poet remarks, when the hero's sword breaks on the dragon's head, that Beowulf has always had trouble with them, the force of his arm so strong that swords tend to break (lines 2680–87). He lays aside his sword to fight Grendel and uses the giant sword to kill Grendel's mother when the famous manmade one, Hrunting, lent by Unferth, fails. He kills Dæghræfn by crushing him in his arms. Since Beowulf is a warrior, this is at least an indication that he has not lived by the sword in the same way as many others we have seen: the only funeral pyre we witness as a result of his sword is his own. The swords found by Wiglaf in the dragon's mound are quickly buried with Beowulf: they have no future with the Geats.

Beowulf points to a social desire for peace after exhaustion by war and the loss of future, which can be joined with Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, at the end of so much slaughter and the failure of negotiation, in mourning for a culture with such noble beginnings, so long ago, for which a future is impossible. At first it might have seemed that Christianity was a guarantor, and yet the life of the sword at ground level continued despite it. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*¹³ testify first to the death of kings at the hands of others in many such simple entries as 656, 'Her wæs Peada ofslagan. ond Wulfere Pending feng to Myrcena rice'¹⁴ ('Peada was

¹³ Translations are from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. and collated by Anne Savage (London: Heinemann, 1982), *passim*.

¹⁴ *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. by Charles Plummer and John Earle, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892–99; repr. 1972), I.

killed, and Wulfhere, son of Penda, received the Mercian kingdom'); 697, 'Her Suðan hvmbre ofslogon Ostryðe Æðelredes cwen' ('The Mercians killed Osthryth, Aethelred's queen'); and 746, 'Her mon slog Selred cyning' ('King Selred was killed'). A closer look at a feud and the many deaths it brought about can be found in the entry for 757, in which King Sigebryht has his jurisdiction removed by King Cynewulf and the counsellors of Wessex over all but Hampshire because of many injustices and, after murdering his closest counsellor, Cumbra, is sent into exile, ultimately stabbed to death with the knife of a swineherd avenging the counsellor. The former king's brother, Cyneheard, later plots to kill Cynewulf, and, after succeeding, a bloody standoff between his supporters and the dead king's, each of whom has family members fighting for the other side, leaves only one of Cyneheard's supporters alive. Such ravages continue to be reported fairly regularly in the *Chronicles*. While this does not imply constant war for the Anglo-Saxons, it points to an acceptable level of violence which flared up under conditions of kingly ambition and rivalry which drew in many family groups, as in *Beowulf*. The arrival of the Scandinavian invaders altered the native configuration of violent encounters and raised the level of violence considerably.

The arrival of the Northmen in 793, presaged by 'reðe forebecna' ('fierce, foreboding omens'), extreme weather, fiery dragons in the sky, and famine, brought ravages, 'reaflac ond man sleht' ('brutal robbery and slaughter'). The entry for 836 records King Ecgbryht's battle with twenty-five ships of Danes at Carhampton, who defeated him and killed many of his men. In 855 the Danes wintered over at Sheppey, and the entry for 865 explains the futile strategy of paying them off in exchange for peace: even so, 'se here hine on niht up bestæl ond oferhergode ealle Cent eastewearde' ('The army stole up by night and ravaged all eastern Kent'). Again and again the Danish force winters over in different locations, or stays for a year in York, as mentioned in the entry for 869.

King Alfred's successful battles kept Wessex for a relatively brief time in this history from assault; meanwhile, and elsewhere in England, communities made peace with the invaders as best they could under occupation and settlement. Conflict continued even so: the entry for 885 describes the citizens' defence of Rochester under siege until Alfred arrived, and the Danes' quitting the battlefield for their ships; nevertheless, later in the year, after a successful battle for the Anglo-Saxons in East Anglia, over sixteen ships on the Stour estuary met another Danish fleet afterwards, on the way home, and was beaten. The 897 entry comments that the Danish force split, one part in East Anglia and the other in Northumbria, some even leaving for the continent:

Næfde se here, Godes þonces, Angelcyn alles forswiðe gebrocod; Ac hie wæron micle swiþor gebrocode on þam þrim gearum mid ceapes cwilde ond monna, alles swiþost mid þam þæt manigra þara selestena cynges þena þe þær on londe wæron forðferdon on þam þrim gearum; þara wæs sum Swiðulf biscop on Hrofesceastre, ond Ceolmund ealdormon on Cent, ond Beorhtulf ealdormon on Eastseaxum, ond Wulfred ealdormon on Hamtunscire, 7 Ealhheard biscop æt Dorceastre, 7 Eadulf cynges þegn on Suðseaxum, ond Beornulf wicgefera on Winteceastre, ond Ecgulf cynges horsþegn, ond manige eac him þeh ic ða geðungnestan nemde.

[The force had not, by the grace of God, utterly broken down the English; but they were more greatly broken in these three years by the slaughter of cattle and men, most of all by the fact that many of the king's best thanes in the land had died in those three years. One of them was Swithulf, bishop of Rochester; also Ceolmund, ealdorman in Kent, Beorhtulf, ealdorman in Essex, Wulfred, ealdorman in Hampshire, Ealhheard, bishop of Dorchester, Eadulf, king's thane in Sussex, Beornulf, reeve of Winchester, Ecgulf, king's horse-thane, and many others also, though I have named the most distinguished.]

In 904, reminiscent of the two instances in *Beowulf* in which peace is broken, or predicted to be broken, by deceit or treachery, is the entry 'aspon Æðelwald þone here on Eastenglum to unfriðe, þæt hie hergodon ofer Mercna land' ('Athelwald lured the East Anglian force into breaking the peace, so that they ravaged over the land of Mercia'). While King Edward drove them back, afterwards the Kentish force stayed on against orders and many were killed in another assault by the Danes (a list of names, as above, is included); the chronicler remarks that even though more Danes were killed than English, the Danes won the battle.

So it continues through the Battle of Maldon in 991, which was lost despite heroic sacrifices by the local leader and his men. While the attacker, Olaf, was sponsored at confirmation after peace was made, the chronicler remarks,

On ðam ylcan geare man gerædde þæt man geald ærost gael Deniscan mannum. for ðan wundræn þe hi worhton be sæ rīman. þæt was ærost tyn þusend punda. Þene ræd gerædde Siric arcebisop.

[In this year it was first counselled that tribute be yielded to the Danishmen, because of the horrors they worked along the coasts. The first payment was ten thousand pounds, at the advice of archbishop Sigeric.]

In 1011, most of seventeen counties have been occupied.

Ealle þas ungesælða us gelumpon þurh unrædes. þæt mann nolde him to timan gafol bedan. ac þonne hi mæst to yfele gedon hæfdon. þonne nam man grið. ond frið wið hi. ond naðelæs for eallum þisum griðe ond friðe ond gafole. hi ferdon æghwider folc mælum. ond hergodon. ond ure earne folc ræpton ond slogon.

[All this unhappiness befell us through bad counsel, that tribute was not promised them in time, nor were they withstood; but when they had done the most evil, men made truce

and treaty with them. Nonetheless, for all this truce, treaty and tribute they went everywhere in raiding bands, and plundered and killed our wretched folk.]

The approximate date of the *Beowulf* manuscript at 1000 CE places it between these two entries or shortly after. James Campbell comments on the years between the Battle of Maldon and 1017,

The period which saw the extinction of the power of a whole political elite saw also the introduction of political violence of a kind unprecedented among the English since, probably, the eighth century. If we exclude the murder of Edward the Martyr, the tale of horrors begins with the blinding of Aelfgar on Aethelred's orders in 991. (I believe this may be the first English incidence of such a penalty.) But the sequence of political killings began in 1006 and continued for more than a generation.¹⁵

The violence in *Beowulf* illustrates a culture in the grip of a paradox: warriors and war are necessary to keep the peace, but they constantly break the peace once established. But the violence contiguous to the copying of the poem points less to the decline and extinction of individual tribes, tragic as that is in the poem, than to the loss of hope for a national peace — perhaps even of a nation. It is difficult not to read the poem as a farewell, both to the best of the Germanic past in the figures of Scyld and Beowulf, but also to a conceivable English identity and bearable future.

The grave in Mound 12 at Sutton Hoo held a little boy with a scaled-down spear.¹⁶ His future status as warrior denied him in this life, he was nevertheless laid out in a way which points to what he would have been. I introduced this paper with the quotation from Foucault which describes the way we continue to read *Beowulf* very deeply, through many layers of critical history, of longing and intellectual distancing. Critical writings placed around the poem define and redefine its character as glorifying or lamenting war; we read through layers of awareness of past and future, and through our own 'huge investment' in the poem as an artefact we view and re-view over years, even over generations, with something like the care we give our own personal pasts, and what those will mean for our future.

¹⁵ James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London: Hambledon & London, 2000), p. 174.

¹⁶ 'Whether a miniature spear or arrowhead, it anticipates the child's future arms-bearing status': Martin Carver and others, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 69 (London: British Museum, 2005).

LAMENTS FOR LOST CHILDREN: LATIN TRADITIONS

Jan M. Ziolkowski

If a macabre paradox may be permitted, then it could be fairly said that laments for dead children, which abound in Latin texts from throughout the medieval period, show particular vitality from the tenth century and later.¹ The body of laments that survives from both the Middle Ages in general and the High Middle Ages in particular is threefold. First, many Latin laments were inspired by the Bible and Christian religion. The formal expression of ritual performances connected with death took place in Latin, the language of the liturgy. In a second category belong laments to mark the passing of then-contemporary royalty, nobility, and ecclesiastics, because the deaths of figures of such importance and memorability were likely to elicit (not necessarily to the exclusion of corresponding vernacular songs) texts composed, delivered orally, and written down in Latin. Last but not least, the literary history of Latin lament begins already in classical antiquity, and specimens of lament that stood out in canonical works of Roman literature were also read, studied, and imitated by the students, scholars, and various others who became Medieval Latin authors. In sum, as the corpus of Medieval Latin literature grew, new laments took their place not only alongside old ones in the Bible and Classics but also alongside new poetic reconceptions of those same old ones.

For most of the medieval period Latin enjoyed a special status as the favoured language of record for compositions deemed worthy to be preserved in manuscripts or inscriptions. Put simply, it was the language of literacy and texts, of the Classics and Scripture, of the school and Church. In practical terms, it was the language that could be understood across the borders of time and space. By and large, Latin written

¹ For a succinct guide to the genre, see Claude Thiry, *La Plainte funèbre*, *Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental*, 30 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978).

in one century could be understood in another, and in one region, within another.² This durability entailed a degree of detachment (though not to be exaggerated) from everyday life. One explanation for the presence of lamentations in Medieval Latin literature may be the yearning of authors to bridge this distance from the realities and real emotions of life outside monasteries, chanceries, and courts. Nothing could be more elementally human than the passions and words of women and men as they grieve, especially in mourning over children, above all their own children.

In view of the functions that written Latin served in Europe during the Middle Ages (which are in fact often called the Latin Middle Ages), it should come as no surprise that laments in the learned language have come down in greater numbers than have those in any of the individual vernaculars. In the fullest inventory of medieval laments that has been produced to date, Latin ones occupy thirteen pages, whereas French cover only four, German five, Italian three, and English a mere one.³ To apply another gauge to the same resource, 153 Latin laments are catalogued in the same listing, in comparison with 52 Provençal (more accurately, Old Occitan), 56 French, 58 German, and 14 English.

Although in the early twenty-first century the importance of English has eclipsed that of many other languages (both European and non-European), the current state of affairs reveals nothing about the relative ranking of the same tongues in the Middle Ages. At points it would have been difficult to foresee, to cite only two examples, that Occitan or Dutch would be shouldered aside centuries later by English to become so-called minor languages, rather than being on a par with it or even outstripping it.

The triumph of English and other global languages may come at a steep cost: sometimes the literatures of minority languages, whether long dead or half dead or still clinging tenuously to life, threaten to be like children whose demises are be-moaned. One means of preserving these waifs — which is to say, the Medieval Latin laments for dead children — is to examine their parentage, since by recognizing their nature and nurture we help to keep alive an awareness that they were not only children but themselves parents and that their eventual passing was not without

² On the roles that Latin played in the Middle Ages, see Ralph Hexter, “‘Latinitas’ in the Middle Ages: Horizons and Perspectives”, *Helios*, 14 (1987), 69–92, and Jan M. Ziolkowski, ‘Towards a History of Medieval Latin Literature’, in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 505–36.

³ Janthia Yearley, ‘A Bibliography of *Planctus* in Latin, Provençal, French, German, English, Italian, Catalan, and Galician-Portuguese from the Time of Bede to the Early Fifteenth Century’, *Journal of the Plainsong and Mediaeval Music Society*, 4 (1981), 12–52.

progeny. A biological perspective on literary history may be old-fashioned, and indeed literary history as a very aspiration has itself been judged to be superseded, but the fact remains that hundreds of years and of texts in one language can be seen sometimes to have had an impact on those in another. It is to exploring the Latin texts that I propose to turn soon, but first it seems sensible to explain my understandings of the key terms and concepts in my topic.

What is a child? The topic of laments for dead children requires at least two definitions. Although even death may not be as clear-cut as a first glance would suggest (especially within a Christian framework), the two terms that most demand clarification are 'children' and 'laments'. At first blush the question of what a child is would seem so simple to answer as not to merit discussion. However inappropriate a comparison between a piece of pornography and a child may be, the fact remains that the two have something in common. To paraphrase the famous dictum of the late Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart (1915–85) to characterize pornography, all of us know one when we see it.⁴ Then again, can we be so confident? The word 'child' is applied in English routinely in at least a half dozen distinct senses.⁵ Three of these are especially relevant for our purposes. First, a child can be a person in the years between birth and puberty. Second, a child can be an infant, either unborn or born. Third, a child can be a son or daughter.

The three denotations reveal immediate conflicts with one other. The third definition equates a child with the progeny of a parent, which would mean that in this sense a child will remain forever a child, regardless of age, but especially in the eyes of a mother or father. The second definition is the most restricted chronologically, whereas the first is broader. To complicate matters further, the onset of puberty shifts from one era to another, in response to diet and social factors that continue to be analysed and argued.⁶ Still more important, the number and bandwidth of life stages vary from one culture to another. In recent times the lengthening of life spans in many places has caused the concept of old to change substantially, and what happens at one end of the spectrum can occur equally easily at the other. Within the framework that held sway in much of the Middle Ages,

⁴ The famous saying 'I know it when I see it' is recorded in Stewart's concurring opinion in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964). On the history of the aphorism, see Paul Gewirtz, 'On "I Know It When I See It"', *Yale Law Journal*, 105 (1996), 1023–47.

⁵ *American Heritage Dictionary*, ed. by William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 233.

⁶ Peter D. Gluckman and Mark A. Hanson, 'Evolution, Development, and Timing of Puberty', *Trends in Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 17 (2006), 7–12.

infancy lasted from birth to age seven, childhood from seven to fourteen, and youth from fourteen to the mid-twenties.⁷

It could be argued that the scope of the differences perceived between children and adults shifts from one time to another. Notably, a thesis advanced by the historian Philippe Ariès (1914–84) in a book published first in French (1960) and shortly thereafter in English (1962) maintained that the idea of childhood as a distinct phase of human development did not exist in the Middle Ages and that medieval people, including parents, viewed children, even their own, with indifference.⁸ In the nearly fifty years that have elapsed since the publication of Ariès's book, the thesis has been roundly rejected by most historians, literary historians, and cultural historians who have focused upon the history of children and childhood.⁹

Whatever conclusion is reached about how children and childhood were perceived in the Middle Ages, one consensus about medieval life (or death) is that infant mortality ran very high.¹⁰ For instance, one scholar calculated that nearly a

⁷ These ages are my approximations. For extended treatments of the various schemata that were followed in the Middle Ages, see J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), and Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁸ Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960); in English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Knopf, 1962).

⁹ Over the past twenty years, the revisionism has ramified in many different studies, of which the most important are Anthony Burton, 'Looking Forward from Ariès? Pictorial and Material Evidence for the History of Childhood and Family Life', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 203–29; Albrecht Classen, 'Philippe Ariès and the Consequences: History of Childhood, Family Relations, and Personal Emotions: Where do We Stand Today?', in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 1–65; Jeremy P. Goldberg, Felicity Riddy, and Mike Tyler, 'Introduction: After Ariès', in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeremy P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 1–10; Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Medievalists and the Study of Childhood', *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 440–60; Margaret L. King, 'Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We Might Go', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60 (2007), 371–407; James A. Schultz, 'Medieval Adolescence: The Claims of History and the Silence of German Narrative', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 519–39.

¹⁰ For two expert studies that mention this fact in passing, see G. Hühne-Osterloh and Gisela Grupe, 'Causes of Infant Mortality in the Middle Ages Revealed by Chemical and Palaeopathological Analyses of Skeletal Remains', *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie*, 77 (1989), 247–58, and Mary E. Lewis, 'Impact of Industrialization: Comparative Study of Child Health in Four Sites from Medieval and Postmedieval England (AD 850–1859)', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 119 (2002), 211–23.

third of infants died in the first year after birth, while only half reached the age of five.¹¹ Another reckoned that more than a quarter passed away in the first year, with half as many perishing between the ages of one and four.¹²

For the purposes of this study children will be understood to comprehend those who are fourteen years of age or younger. Special attention will be paid when laments are made for infants, to see if such deaths elicited distinctive treatment. Additionally, the death of a son or daughter, regardless of the age, will be considered when it is lamented by a parent.

What is a 'lament'? An exclamation of 'Good riddance!' to the news of a death would not be judged a lament, although this sort of a response might pass muster itself as being lamentable. The most famous example of such a reaction in cinema would be the sung response of 'Ding-dong, the witch is dead' in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. But if such rare exceptions are not argued to be the rule, then there seems scant reason not to define lament as 'What is said when someone is dead or is believed to be dead'.¹³

As this aphoristically brief definition reminds us, lament is not inherently or merely an individual literary phenomenon.¹⁴ On the contrary, it is often very likely to be traditional and ritual, since the aftermath of death is among the most ritualized of phases connected with human life in most cultures. At the same time, the operative word in the definition quoted is 'said'. This main verb places lament squarely in the realm of rhetoric which signals the fact that it was originally and remained heavily oral.¹⁵ The theory of lament is appropriately treated in rhetoric, since lament is declamatory or (better) exclamatory.¹⁶ One further point worth bearing in mind is that lament can be freestanding as lyric or incorporated or inset into other forms, such as prosimetrum, or genres, such as narrative or drama.¹⁷

¹¹ Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 149.

¹² Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 113.

¹³ Velmond Bourgeois Richmond, *Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative*, Duquesne Studies: Philological Series, 8 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1966), pp. 13, 29.

¹⁴ Richmond, *Laments for the Dead*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁵ George R. Keiser, 'The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos', in *Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 167–93.

¹⁶ Richmond, *Laments for the Dead*, p. 17.

¹⁷ On the sorts of insertion that took place, see Maureen Boulton, *The Song in the Story: Lyric Insertions in French Narrative Fiction, 1200–1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). On combinations of prose and verse, see Bernhard Pabst, *Prosimetrum: Tradition und*

The status of lament is not uniform but varies greatly from culture to culture. Particularly striking in the ancient Mediterranean world is that *threnos* became an elevated genre in Greek. It designated sung poetry, in contradistinction to spoken lament. The lament encapsulated in *threnos* was not tied to the presence of the body, the funeral, or any other specific location or occasion. Rather, its primary function was to mark the memory of the dead. The word took root in Latin in late antiquity and retained a sheen of slightly exotic glamour in Medieval Latin, most memorably in the title (and title character) of the twelfth-century verse satire *Architrenius* (Arch-weeper) by Johannes de Hauvilla (John of Hanville).¹⁸ It entered into vernacular languages only late and as a learned word.

Other Greek technical terms that crop up in Latin with some regularity include *elegus* and particularly *epicedium* / *epicedion*. When used precisely, an epicedium was a song of mourning to praise the dead that was sung — or that was styled as if to be sung — in the presence of the corpse.¹⁹ Differentiating between elegy and epicedium is not always easy, since formally both are often in elegiac distichs (or at least in hexameters). Elegy lamented, praised, and consoled. In the grammatical tradition it was well known that elegy derived from a Greek word, and it was felt to be closely related to eulogies for the dead, with grieving, and with weeping.²⁰ However, the term ‘elegy’ is seldom applied today in reference to Medieval Latin or to medieval Romance literature.

The lexicon to describe lament covered an extensive range in Latin during the Middle Ages, since not only did the Classical Latin vocabulary remain in usage but also other forms were added. In addition to various other words that will be discussed individually, the thesaurus runs a gamut of *comploratio*, *conquestio* /

Wandel einer Literaturform zwischen Spätantike und Spätmittelalter, 2 vols (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994), and Peter Dronke, *Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ *Threnus* is not included in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. by P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968–82), but it appears as a headword in Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 420. For the Latin text and translation of the satire, see Johannes de Hauvilla, *Architrenius*, trans. and ed. by Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Procope S. Costas and T. V. F. Brogan, ‘Epicedium’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 375.

²⁰ For quotations from the grammarians, see Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers, and Monographs, 25 (Leeds: Cairns, 1991), pp. 201–02.

conquestus, *lamentatio* / *lamentum*, *luctus*, and *querela*. *Complanctus*, the Medieval Latin equivalent of the modern 'complaint', was a rarity.²¹ *Laudatio funebris* was the terminus technicus in Classical Latin that denoted the public funeral oration. *Consolatio* overlapped considerably with lament, but its main function was not to lament the dead but instead to console the survivors. The English term 'dirge' derives from the Latin imperative *dirige* (the first word of the antiphon in the Office of the Dead, adapted from Psalm 5. 9), but in Latin itself *dirige* was not similarly established as a noun.

In contrast to the Greek import *threnus*, the indigenous Latin noun *nenia* or *naenia* took time to overcome even partially its low associations.²² In reference to lamentation, the locus classicus that defines *nenia* is in the *Epitome* of Marcus Verrius Flaccus (c. 55 BCE–c. 20 CE) to *De verborum significatione* (On the Meaning of Words) by the scholar Sextus Pompeius Festus (late second century CE): 'Carmen, quod in funere laudandi gratia cantatur ad tibiam' (a song that is sung to the accompaniment of a flute for the sake of praise at a funeral).²³ Among other things, a *nenia* was a song of lamentation by female relatives of the deceased or by hired female lamenters.²⁴ The afterlife of *nenia* in the Middle Ages manifested an ambivalence, since on the one hand the word could carry disparaging connotations and on the other it became (along with *elegia* and *planctus*) a stock term for classicizing lament.²⁵

The English word 'plaint' has a quaint ring, more so than the Old Occitan *planh*, French *plainte*, Italian *pianto*, or Spanish *planto* (or *llanto*). All these nouns in

²¹ *Mittelateinisches Wörterbuch bis zum ausgehenden 13. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 1959–), p. 1068, lines 32–34.

²² M. Hereswitha Hengstl, *Totenklage und Nachruf in der mittellateinischen Literatur seit dem Ausgang der Antik* (Würzburg: Buchdruckerei Richard Mayr, 1936), p. 5. It is revealing that when Isidore of Seville discusses the Lamentations of Jeremiah, he calls this book of the Bible a *threnos* (which he sees as having its foundational expression in Greek literature in the lyric poetry of Simonides) and equates it with *lamentum*: see *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), I. 39. 19 (unpaginated).

²³ Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu*, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913), p. 155.

²⁴ Dorota Dutsch, 'Nenia: Gender, Genre, and Lament in Ancient Rome', in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. by Ann Suter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 258–79.

²⁵ See Hengstl, *Totenklage und Nachruf in der mittellateinischen Literatur*, p. 30, and Renate Haas, *Die mitttelenglische Totenklage: Realitätsbezug, abendländische Tradition und individuelle Gestaltung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1980), p. 119.

Romance vernacular languages and English descend ultimately from the Classical Latin *planctus*, a term that denoted many different forms of elegy, lament, and complaint, but particularly lamentation over a dead person. In the Middle Ages monks were charged with the task of performing such lamentation ('*plangentis officium*').²⁶ They were the maestros of mourning. They composed new laments or at least preserved them in writing, and they performed old ones in the interlocking cycles of the liturgy, in which commemoration of the recent dead occurred in alternation with remembrance of deaths long past. Because these monks were the technicians of Latin and liturgy, and because unofficial lamentation was regarded with suspicion, they would have been important intermediaries in the lamentation of dead children.

The grief that befalls a parent upon losing a child varies from person to person, time to time, and place to place. In societies with lower birthrates and lower mortality rates, the death of a child may hit harder than in those in which parents have other children upon whom to fall back and in which siblings, parents, spouses, and others die at earlier ages. But it may never be feasible or necessarily desirable or useful to establish a grief index and to peg fluctuations in the acuteness of the bereavement that mothers and fathers have felt upon losing children, regardless of the frequency with which the parent has experienced death or the number of surviving children in the family. Difficulty in evaluating quantitatively an emotion or set of emotions should not be grounds for discounting their possible existence.

In modern times the notion of writing songs about the deaths of children when the composer has not suffered such losses could seem peculiar. Hence the speculation about the reasons for which the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) composed a song-cycle entitled *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Deaths of Children, 1901–04). He took as his texts a selection of five from among 425 lyrics written in 1833–34 (but not published until 1872) by Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) to lament the loss of two of his six children, Luise and Ernst, to a scarlet fever epidemic.

If Rückert's reasons for writing are self-evident, Mahler's personal motivations are more problematic. When he composed his *Lieder*, Mahler had not himself suffered the loss of his own children. In fact, when he embarked upon the cycle, he had not yet even met his wife, let alone had a child, still less lost a child. Before completing the songs, he had married the famous (or infamous) Alma and had become a father. His commitment to composing this particular kind of lament pre-occupied his wife, who had forebodings that the songs might prove to be prophetic.

²⁶ Jerome, *Contra Vigilantium*, para. 15, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne; Paris: Garnier, 1844–65), XXIII, cols 339–52 (col. 351), and cols 353–68 (col. 367). The line is quoted many times by later authors.

This worry was fulfilled in 1907, when the older daughter of Gustav and Alma Mahler died at the age of four from scarlet fever and diphtheria. But specific premonitions about the future loss of his own children probably played less of a role in Mahler's choice of texts than did his own past and present. Seven of his thirteen siblings died before turning two, while the death of a favourite brother at twelve (when Mahler was fourteen) affected him powerfully. Past brushes with mortality could have come back to mind, since early in 1901 a serious hemorrhage caused Mahler to undergo a near-death experience.²⁷

When it comes to Mahler, all the biographical information at our disposal does not resolve definitively the mystery of why he elected at that particular juncture in his life to set to music laments upon the deaths of children. Upon turning to Medieval Latin laments for lost children, we find ourselves in even more challenging circumstances. In most instances we possess little or no hard evidence about the personal history of the authors who wrote Medieval Latin laments. If the truth be known, more often than not the laments are anonymous.

Often the presumption would have to be that the authors of Latin laments were monks or clerics and that they were correspondingly less likely than layfolk to have children of their own — not that exceptions cannot be found. We find nuns and monks who had had children but who upon taking the cloth left them behind in the secular world: Astralabe, the son of Peter Abelard (1079–1142) and Heloise (c. 1100–64), is a celebrated case in point. And other forms of loss could be expressed in terms of a lost child. To remain with Peter Abelard, it is conceivable that on some level he was thinking of Heloise when he conceived of the lament raised by the daughters of Israel for Jephthah's daughter, who had been consecrated to death by her father as Heloise had become dead to the world by entering the nunnery at Abelard's insistence. But most nuns and monks who wrote laments for dead children would not have had their own offspring in mind, since they would have had none. In composing their texts or songs, they could have been stimulated by the losses that others had experienced, such as family members or important patrons of their institutions. In effect, they could have been conduits for a grief that they had not apprehended directly and personally. Or they could have concentrated upon memories of siblings who had died when they themselves were children.

The anachronism would be too great in superimposing Gustav and Alma Mahler upon Peter Abelard and Heloise and in pressing the *Planctus* into the mould of the *Kindertotenlieder*, but the complexities of the correspondences between the twentieth-century *Lieder* and the life of their composer (as opposed to the life of

²⁷ Peter Russell, *Light in Battle with Darkness: Mahler's Kindertotenlieder* (Bern: Lang, 1991).

their poet) are not uninstructional in pondering what could have stirred those who wrote the words and the melodies of Medieval Latin lament songs.

Death was more visible a feature in the Middle Ages than it is today. One has only to glance at the woodcuts in the proofs of the first edition of the *Totentanz* (Dance of Death, Basel, c. 1524–27) cycle by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), where the final individual seized by Death is the youngest child in a family of peasants. But the reality of death suffered by contemporaries is only part of the picture, since many medieval people had their sights trained on deaths that had taken place long, long before their lifetimes.

The most important among the past deaths was obviously the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The human impact of his fatal Passion was brought home through imagination of its effects on the bereft mother, relatives, friends, and followers who mourned his passing. To dwell upon the sufferings of Jesus was an exercise encouraged by many Christian theologians from late antiquity and later. Even as theologians condemned sorrow that led to the profound melancholia known as *acedia* (which was termed ‘spiritual dryness’), many argued for the conscious cultivation of a private and interior contrition (‘wholesome’ or ‘fruitful sorrow’) that was essential to penance. Thus while undue grief for those who died in the here and now was to be shunned, lamenting the sinful failings of human beings and the sufferings of Christ on earth was not only tolerated but encouraged. Lamentation could be part of penance, which was itself a means of reaching God.²⁸

As the foregoing suggests, Christianity brought both different attitudes towards death and different subject matter from those that had prevailed in pre-Christian antiquity.²⁹ The attitudinal shift meant that death occasioned personal grief, but that it was supposed to bring with it its own solace, since believers were encouraged to recognize that death in the here and now led to a new life in the hereafter. Consequently, lamenting deaths even of children could warrant castigation. Furthermore, the effort of the Church to motivate parents to baptize their children engendered centuries of discussion about the grievous fate of unbaptized children, which in effect afforded ample cause for lamentation.³⁰

²⁸ Jean Leclercq and Jean-Paul Bonnes, *Un maître de la vie spirituelle au XI^e siècle, Jean de Fécamp*, Études de théologie et d’histoire de la spiritualité, 9 (Paris: Vrin, 1946), pp. 92–93.

²⁹ Janet Huskinson, ‘Disappearing Children? Children in Roman Funerary Art of the First to the Fourth Century AD’, in *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Katariina Mustakallio and others, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, 33 (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2005), pp. 91–103.

³⁰ Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–c. 1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Thus John Chrysostom (second half of the fourth century) denigrates a poor widow for lamenting the death of her only son.³¹ In 389 Jerome (c. 350–420) writes to the Roman widow Paula to chide her for her excessive lamentation over her young daughter, Blaesilla.³² Humbert of Romans (1200–77) criticizes those who mourn excessively: such a reaction betokens an insufficiency of faith. John Wyclif (c. 1330–84) faults mothers in particular for their tears, crises, and plaints. The good wife of London takes the same outlook.³³ Jean Gerson (1363–1429) rebukes parents who grieve too much.³⁴ Against the backdrop of such sustained criticism, it would have been understandable if those who had suffered losses took the route of channeling their personal grief through mourning daughters and sons whose deaths could be lamented licitly.

Although in many places and times Christian rituals were likely kept free of expressive inflection, an alternative tradition of liturgical cantillation seems to have developed elsewhere. Thus Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) refers to expressive performance that is anything but flatly hieratic. He advocates types of delivery that express emotions, among which he first identifies grief:

Sicque expeditus, uim pronuntiationis tenebit ut ad intellectum mentes omnium sensusque permoueat, discernendo genera pronuntiationum atque exprimendo proprios sententiarum affectus, modo indicantis uoce, modo dolentis, modo increpantis, modo exortantis, siue his similia, secundum genera propriae pronuntiationis.³⁵

[And thus equipped, he will restrain the force of his delivery, so as to prod the minds and sense of everyone to understanding, by differentiating types of delivery and by expressing the emotions appropriate to the phrases, revealing the voice now of a person in grief, now of one speaking angrily, now of one encouraging, and so forth, according to the types of proper delivery.]

³¹ Carol Lansing, *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 103.

³² Letter 39 ('Ad Paulam de morte Blaesillae'), in Hieronymus, *Epistulae 1–70*, ed. by Isidor Hilberg, 2nd edn, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 54 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1996), pp. 293–308.

³³ Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, pp. 151–52 and 154.

³⁴ Françoise Bonney, 'Jean Gerson: un nouveau regard sur l'enfance', *Annales de démographie historique* (1973), 137–42.

³⁵ Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. by Christopher M. Lawson, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), Bk 2, Ch. 11, subsection 2, p. 70, lines 12–17; my translation.

What Isidore envisages here is dramatic chanting of the liturgy, which would of course have entailed readings from the Scripture, and these readings themselves included laments in goodly numbers.

The Bible contains many laments and even more passages that could have inspired poets and singers to supply laments that are implied by the circumstances described in the text. Of the six extant *Planctus* by Peter Abelard, two are for dead who could be qualified as children.³⁶ Adiastematic musical notation has survived for all of them, but notation that enables secure transcription is extant for only the lament of David for Saul and Jonathan.³⁷ In *Planctus* 2 (compare Genesis 42. 36, 43. 14) Jacob laments for sons whom he believes to be dead.³⁸ Nor was Abelard the only creative spirit whose thoughts turned in this direction, since two other poets — an anonymous and Peter of Riga — devised laments of Jacob for Joseph.³⁹ The poem of unknown authorship, transmitted uniquely in a thirteenth-century hand in a single manuscript, was set down with interlinear spacing that must have been meant for musical notation which was never added.⁴⁰ Although it may have been lyric and only lyric, the poem may alternatively have formed part of a religious drama. To turn to the other lament by Abelard, in *Planctus* 3 (compare Judges 11. 29–40) the maidens of Israel join together to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.⁴¹

³⁶ For editions, see *Pietro Abelardo. I 'Planctus': introduzione, testo critico, trascrizioni musicali*, ed. by Giuseppe Vecchi, Istituto di filologia romanza della Università di Roma: Collezione di testi e manuali, 35 (Modena: Società tipografica modenese, 1951), and *Pietro Abelardo: Planctus*, ed. and trans. by Massimo Sannelli, Littera, 3 (Trento: La Finestra, 2002).

³⁷ Lorenz Weinrich, 'Peter Abaelard as Musician I' and 'Peter Abaelard as Musician II', *Musical Quarterly*, 55 (1969), 295–312 and 464–86; Weinrich, 'Dolorum solatium: Text und Musik von Abaelards Planctus', *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch*, 5 (1968), 59–78; and Gerard Le Vot, 'Que savons-nous sur la musique des *Planctus* d'Abelard?', in *Abelard. Lamentations. Histoire de mes malheurs. Correspondance avec Heloise*, trans. by Paul Zumthor, Babel, 52 (Arles: Actes Sud, 1992), pp. 107–22.

³⁸ Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L70 'Infelices filii patre nati misero'.

³⁹ For the text (Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L150 'Ve mihi, ve tibi, ve mihi patri, ve tibi fili'), see *Aurora: Petri Rigae Biblia versificata: A Verse Commentary on the Bible*, ed. by Paul E. Beichner, Publications in Medieval Studies, 19, 2 vols (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), I, 73.

⁴⁰ For an edition of the text (Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L57 'Heu michi, quit feci, Joseph fili'), see Jean Leclercq, 'Complainte de Jacob dans un manuscrit de Madrid', *Hispania Sacra*, 2 (1949), 115–16.

⁴¹ Wolfram von den Steinen, 'Die Planctus Abaelardus Jephthas Tochter', *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch*, 4 (1967), 122–44; and Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke, 'The Lament of Jephthah's

The age of Jephthah's daughter is indeterminate, but she remains a maiden at the time of her death.

However fascinating the Latin laments based upon incidents in the Hebrew Bible may be, they depart from the norm. On the whole, the biblical events of the most moment to the imaginations of Christian poets were those that touched upon the life and death of Jesus Christ himself. In fact, the laments from the Hebrew Bible or related to it that became entrenched in liturgy, literature, or both were ones that could be coordinated somehow with Christ. Thus the Lamentations of Jeremiah, known customarily as the *threni*, became implicated in the Passion, since the custom developed of chanting them on the matins of Passion Sunday.⁴² The Jeremiad was even among the texts first to be outfitted with neumes, the notation used for cantillation and song; this notation is extant in at least eleven Bible manuscripts.⁴³ But none of these details alter one incontrovertible fact: Jeremiah's lamentations had nothing to do with children.

The one lament in the voice of an Old Testament figure for children that acquired any currency achieved such status because it was Christocentric, at least when viewed typologically. The lament in question is for Rachel's children, but it does not appear in Genesis, where Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban, occupies an important place in the account of Jacob. Rather, the weeping of Rachel for her

Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 12 (1971), 819–63 (repr. in Peter Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe*, Storia e letteratura: Raccolta di studi e testi, 183 (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 1992), pp. 345–88).

⁴² Hengstl, *Totenklage und Nachruf in der mittellateinischen Literatur*, p. 15.

⁴³ On eleven manuscripts, see Paul Ludwig, 'Lamentations notées dans quelques manuscrits bibliques', *Études grégoriennes*, 12 (1971), 127–30. On notation of the Lamentations in Beneventan manuscripts and on the possibility that the melody was associated with the Beneventan liturgy, see René-Jean Hesbert, 'La Tradition bénéventaine', in *Les Principaux Manuscrits de chant grégorien, ambrosien, mozarabe, gallican publiés en fac-similés phototypiques sous la direction de dom Joseph Gajard moine de Solesmes*, Facsimilés phototypiques des principaux manuscrits de chant grégorien, ambrosien, mozarabe, gallican, 14 (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre, 1936; repr. Bern: Lang, 1971), 60–465, pp. 417–18, n. 1 as well as Plates xxvii–xxix; Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The Beneventan Chant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 132, n. 24; and Jean Mallet and André Thibaut, *Les Manuscrits en écriture bénéventaine de la bibliothèque capitulaire de Bénévent*, Documents, études, et répertoires, 3 vols (Paris: Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, 1984–97), III, 944, n. 1. Even the famous Codex Amiatinus (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Amiatinus 1) contains neumatation to the Lamentations: see Oskar Fleischer, *Die germanischen Neumen als Schlüssel zum altchristlichen und gregorianischen Gesang* (Frankfurt a.M.: Anstalt, 1923), p. 124 (with a transposition of one lamentation found in a tenth-century manuscript as Appendix no. 8).

children is mentioned in Jeremiah 31. 15, where it does not refer specifically to any earlier passage in the Bible: "Thus saith the Lord: "A voice was heard on high of lamentation, of mourning, and weeping, of Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted for them, because they are not." Instead, it is a lament imagined by the prophet, to allegorical effect. Rachel's children represent the house of Israel, which has been removed from its land by the Assyrians.

In turn, the verse in Jeremiah is cited explicitly in Matthew 2. 17–18: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying: "A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." The embedding of the reference in Matthew lends gravitas to the verse, since the event in the Gospel that instigates it is the Slaughter of the Innocents (Matthew 2. 16) — the killing, at Herod's order, of all children in the environs of Bethlehem who were two years or younger.

The earliest poem to focus upon Rachel's lament was a sequence by Notker Balbulus ('the Stammerer') of St Gall (c. 840–912), generally esteemed as his most beautiful poem, in his *Liber ymnorum*. The sequence is entitled *De uno martyre virgo plorans* (Virgin Lamenting a Martyr, incipit 'Quid tu virgo'), which connects Rachel with the Virgin Mary and the son she bewails not only with the innocent babes slain in place of Jesus but by extension also with any other innocent sacrificed to save others.⁴⁴ It was set to a melody that became widely known.⁴⁵ The sequence merits comparison with the poem entitled 'Virgo plorans' (Virgin Lamenting, incipit 'Haec est sancta').⁴⁶

Heightening the complexity of the sequence is that Rachel was identified with Ecclesia (the Church), whereas her bleary-eyed sister Leah was aligned with Synagoga (the Synagogue), and Jacob with Christ, as the divine bridegroom of Ecclesia. The sequence has the additional perplexity of being dialogic, but — as is so often the case in premodern texts — the absence of quotation marks in the manuscripts leaves mysterious how many speakers participate and where their speeches begin and end.⁴⁷

The sequence, which had been restricted to use in the Mass, was later incorporated into ecclesiastic dramas for the Christmas season about the Slaughter of the

⁴⁴ The best text (Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L134 'Quid tu Virgo mater ploras') is in Wolfram von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter und seine geistige Welt*, 2 vols (Bern: Francke, 1948), 'Editionsband', pp. 86 (Latin), 87 (German translation), and 174 (apparatus criticus).

⁴⁵ Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, 'Darstellungsband', pp. 593–94.

⁴⁶ For the best edition of Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L152 'Virgo plorans filium', see Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, 'Editionsband', pp. 42–43.

⁴⁷ Steinen, *Notker der Dichter*, 'Darstellungsband', p. 402.

Innocents. The earliest of these was the *Ordo Rachelis* from Freising from about 1100, but the sequence continued to be made a central component at Fleury roughly a century and a half later.⁴⁸ These dramatic versions of the episode tended to enlarge the dialogue by supplying further interlocutors.⁴⁹ They include hexameters, and they have musical notation in heightened neumes.

Herod decided to execute the infants of Bethlehem directly as a result of the Adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2. 16–18). In other words, the Magi's search for the babe whose miraculous birth had been signalled to them prompted the Massacre. As a consequence, the two scenes came to be linked closely in observances of the Christmas season and hence of Christ's birth and infancy. In the liturgy that prevailed in most parts of Europe, the Massacre of the Innocents was commemorated on 28 December and the Epiphany on 6 January.

Christian responses to the Massacre of the Innocents reflect the Christian ambivalence about the death of children. In a series of sermons for the feast day of the Innocents, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) singles out for special remark that by dying so young the infants who were slain died innocent and were thus 'born happily into life'.⁵⁰ To have been murdered almost at birth meant that the infants could proceed directly from their cradles to the crowns of martyrdom. For these reasons, the Massacre of the Innocents could provide comfort for bereft parents by reminding them of the heavenly rewards their daughters and sons were already enjoying. Thus Paulinus of Nola (353–431) suggested that parents who had lost their own children would take solace in the worship of the Holy Innocents.⁵¹ According to the *vita* (907) by Hucbald of St-Amand (c. 840–930), the nun Rictrude

⁴⁸ For basic but dated bibliography on such Rachel laments, see Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L53 'Heu heu heu, quid me incusastis'; L54 'Heu heu heu, quomodo gaudebo'; L63 'Heu teneri partus'; L94 'O dolor O patrum mutataque gaudia matrum'; L95 'O dulces filii quos nunc progenui'; L96 'O dulces innocentum acies'; L124 'Planctus matrum et Rachelis'.

⁴⁹ Hengstl, *Totenklage und Nachruf in der mittellateinischen Literatur*, pp. 36–37. The definitive study of the relationship between the succession from the Rachel laments to the Mary laments is Susan Boynton, 'From the Lament of Rachel to the Lament of Mary: A Transformation in the History of Drama and Spirituality', in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. by Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell, *Studies in Comparative Literature*, 43 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 319–40.

⁵⁰ For the Latin text, see *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Migne, XXXVIII, cols 1026–39. For discussion of such sermons, see Paul A. Hayward, 'Suffering and Innocence in Latin Sermons for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, c. 400–800', *Studies in Church History*, 31 (1994), 67–80.

⁵¹ Cited in Patricia Healy Wasylw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe*, *Studies in Church History*, 2 (New York: Lang, 2008), p. 33.

(c. 614–88), abbess of Marchiennes Abbey in Flanders, lamented the death of her youngest daughter, Adalsinda, on Innocents Day ‘when Holy Church recalls the Massacre of the Innocents and the misery of their bereft mothers’.⁵²

At the same time theologians, authors, and artists understood that the normal reaction of parents to the death of daughters or sons was the profoundest of grief and that therefore the mothers who suffered through the Massacre of the Innocents were permitted to evidence a violence of grief that would not have been countenanced under other circumstances.⁵³ Augustine is in no way inconsistent or unique in recounting in ghastly detail the struggle of the mothers to save their children or the acuteness of their lamentation over the sacrifice. Amalar of Metz (c. 775–c. 850) commented explicitly on the feast day of the Innocents by saying that ‘the author of this office wishes us to be made one with the spirits of the pious women who grieved and sorrowed at the death of the Innocents’.⁵⁴ The shock and horror of the mothers at the slaughter of their infant sons were all too comprehensible and readily shared reactions to the loss of loved ones through death; but the faithful were to bear in mind that those who were lost were saved through their very deaths — as well as through the ultimate sacrifice of Christ crucified, who is present implicitly as the provocation and resolution of the Massacre. The foremost literary expression of the lament that the mothers of the Holy Innocents made was probably the one contained in a Christmas play in the *Carmina Burana*.⁵⁵

⁵² Hucbald, *Vita Sanctae Rictrudis*, Chapter 13, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Migne, CXXXII, col. 840A: ‘quo sancta recolit Ecclesia victimationem parvulorum pro Christo ab Herode jugulatorum, et miserabilem matrum tristitiam’. For information on Rictrude and her legend, see *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. by Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 195–219 (for this translation, p. 210); and Karine Ugé, ‘The Legend of Saint Rictrude: Formation and Transformations (Tenth–Twelfth Century)’, in *Anglo-Norman Studies 23: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000*, ed. by John Gillingham (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), pp. 281–97.

⁵³ Henry Maguire, ‘The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 31 (1977), 123–74 (pp. 130–31).

⁵⁴ *Liber officialis*, I, 41. 19–21, in *Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia*, ed. by Ioannes Michael Hanssens, *Studi e testi*, 138–40, 3 vols (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1948–50), II, 193: ‘Compositor officii praesentis coniungi nos vult animis devotarum feminarum, quae in morte innocentum doluerunt et planxerunt.’

⁵⁵ Yearley, ‘Bibliography of *Planctus*’, L51 ‘Heu heu heu! Mens Herodis effera’ is *Carmina Burana*, no. 227, in *Die Trink- und Spiellieder – Die geistlichen Dramen, Nachträge*, ed. by Otto Schumann and Bernhard Bischoff (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), I, 3, 99–100. For discussion, see Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), II, 172–96.

Although elements of continuity may be found between Marian laments in Latin and in earlier classical literature, the two sets of texts differ fundamentally.⁵⁶ No parent's lament for a child has received anything approaching the attention that has been accorded that of the mother of God beneath the cross and at the sepulchre over the Passion and death of her son.⁵⁷ In Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, it is the presence of the Marys at the final moment of Jesus's life that is emphasized.⁵⁸ In the account of the deposition, Christ's body is laid on a sheet brought by Joseph of Arimathea. Only a very few relatives and friends remain on scene.⁵⁹

The theme is most familiar today from art, as in the scene known as *Mater dolorosa* that portrays the Virgin as a sorrowful mother who contemplates her suffering son at the cross, or the other called the *Pietà*, in which the body of Jesus rests on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion. But the expressions of such vignettes in representational art followed an explosion of texts, most of them initially in Latin, that gave voice both lyrically and dramatically to the Passion by singling out the dual character of the Virgin as both divine and earthly mother.

Laments of the Virgin surged in tandem with the overall rise of her cult in the West.⁶⁰ The earliest literary Marian lament would be the sequence 'Maesta parentis Christi', if it is to be dated in the twelfth century, by Adam of St Victor (1110–92).⁶¹

⁵⁶ Pace Ernesto De Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale: dal lamento funebre antico al pianto di Maria*, 2nd edn (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).

⁵⁷ Eduard Wechssler, *Die romanischen Marienklagen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Dramas im Mittelalter* (Halle a.S.: Karras, 1893), and Sandro Sticca, *The 'Planctus Mariae' in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

⁵⁸ In Matthew 27. 56, it is Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee; in Mark 15. 40–41, 'Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joseph, and Salome [...] and many other women that came up with him to Jerusalem'; in Luke 23. 49, 'all of his acquaintance, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things'; and in John 19. 25, 'his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen [...] and the disciple whom he loved'.

⁵⁹ In addition to Joseph, Matthew 27. 61 has Mary Magdalen and 'the other Mary'; Mark 15. 47, Mary Magdalen and the mother Mary; Luke 23. 55, 'the women that were come with him from Galilee'. In John 19. 25–20. 6, those at the deposition and tomb who see Jesus are the apostle John, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Mary Magdalen.

⁶⁰ Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

⁶¹ Andreas Krass, *Stabat mater dolorosa: lateinische Überlieferung und volkssprachliche Übertragungen im deutschen Mittelalter* (Munich: Fink, 1998), p. 121.

Regardless of dating, we find numerous laments of the Virgin at the cross.⁶² (It merits mentioning that these laments are not solely in Latin: the earliest lament in Castilian is the lament of the Virgin by Gonzalo de Berceo (c. 1190 – before 1264), which is related to the pseudo-Bernardine *Liber de passione*.⁶³) Sometimes these lamentations over the dead Christ involve not only Mary but also Saint John. In other instances they include two or more Marys at the sepulchre.⁶⁴ And in a few cases it is not even possible to determine definitively how many and which Marys participate.⁶⁵

The very name of the *Mater dolorosa* derives from the second and third words of the famous thirteenth-century hymn that is known by its incipit 'Stabat mater'.⁶⁶ This circumstance indicates the prominence of Marian laments in Medieval Latin literature. The most important early expression of such grief, considered the ur-type of Marian lament, is a sequence with the incipit 'Planctus ante nescia', which is dated at the latest to the 1140s and is ascribed to Godfrey of St Victor (c. 1130–94, often confused with Geoffrey of Breteuil).⁶⁷ This lament,

⁶² For examples, see Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L13 'Ante crucem virgo stabat', L18 'Contemplerur crucifixum', L20 'Cum de cruce deponitur', L38 'Filii praesentia mater destituta', L50 'Heu heu, Christe Deus', L98 'O filii ecclesiae deplangite mecum hodie', and L99 'O fratres et sorores'.

⁶³ Gonzalo de Berceo, *Obras completas*, ed. by Carlos Clavería and Jorge García López (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 2003). For discussion, see Martin Franzbach, 'Die *Planctus Mariae Virginis* von Gonzalo de Berceo und Jacopone da Todì', *Cultura neolatina*, 27 (1967), 95–108.

⁶⁴ The most notable would be the one in the 'Ripoll' Resurrection play (from Vic), in *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. by O. B. Hardison, Jr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 240–44 and 301–04. On Laments of Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary in particular, see Peter Dronke, 'Laments of the Maries: From the Beginnings to the Mystery Plays', in *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See. Studien zur europäischen Kulturtradition*, ed. by Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988), pp. 89–116, repr. in Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe*, pp. 457–89.

⁶⁵ For example, see Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L55 'Heu infelices quid agimus', L59 'Heu nobis internas mentes', L60 'Heu pius pastor occidit', L62 'Heu redemptio Israel', and L111 'Omnipotens pater altissime'.

⁶⁶ For detailed information on the hymn, see Krass, *Stabat mater dolorosa*.

⁶⁷ 'Planctus ante nescia' is Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L123. For the text of the sequence and information on Godfrey, see Françoise Gasparri, 'Godefroid de Saint Victor: une personnalité peu connue du monde intellectuel et artistique parisien au XII^e siècle', *Scriptorium*, 39 (1985), 57–69 (p. 69). For the most recent views on the ascription and dating, see Dronke, 'Laments of the Maries', pp. 89 and 94.

which is found in the famous *Carmina Burana* codex, was imitated repeatedly not only in Latin but also in the vernaculars.⁶⁸ A tractate on it, falsely ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153), incorporated the lament into a narrative context: the preacher prays to the Virgin to share the particulars of her suffering and pains.⁶⁹ After the virgin pours out her grief, the deposition, lamentation, burial, and departure of the mourners are described.

Even just from what has been described thus far of Marian laments, it should be apparent that the genre lent itself to drama. Other laments that have been seen to be related somehow to dramatic treatments of the Passion are ‘Flete, fideles animae’ and ‘Qui per viam pergitis’.⁷⁰ Accordingly, it is not unexpected that a long, originally independent *Planctus Mariae* comes to be incorporated into many a Passion play.⁷¹ In fact, the laments of Mary have been credited as being the first step towards dramatization of the Passion.⁷² One of the most easily visualized Marian laments in medieval literature is the 127-line *Planctus Mariae*, itself probably thirteenth-century but in a fourteenth-century manuscript, with musical notation of melodies, from Cividale del Friuli, a few miles north of Venice.⁷³

⁶⁸ *Carmina Burana*, no. 14*, in *Die Trink- und Spiellieder*, ed. by Schumann and Bischoff, 1.3, pp. 129–34, which replaces the earlier edition by Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 496–98. For combinations of it with ‘Heu, heu! Virgineus flos’, see Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 506. On its influence on vernacular literature, see Ursula Hennig, ‘Die lateinische Sequenz “Planctus ante nescia” and die deutsche Marienklagen’, in *Latein und Volkssprache im deutschen Mittelalter, 1100–1500: Regensburger Colloquium 1988*, ed. by Nikolaus Henkel and Nigel F. Palmer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), pp. 164–77.

⁶⁹ Gerd Seewald, ‘Die Marienklage im mittellateinischen Schrifttum und in den germanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hamburg, 1953), pp. 144–57; Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 496–98. For discussion, see Krass, *Stabat mater dolorosa*, pp. 123–26.

⁷⁰ For ‘Flete, fideles animae’ (Yearley, ‘Bibliography of *Planctus*’, L42), see Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 498–99; for ‘Qui per viam pergitis’ (L132), Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 500–02. Dronke, ‘Laments of the Maries’, p. 89, proposed a dating of 1150–70 for ‘Flete, fideles animae’.

⁷¹ See Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 503–06.

⁷² This is the case in both of the foundational studies, Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, and E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1903): see Sticca, ‘*Planctus Mariae*’, p. 2.

⁷³ Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 506–13. For more recent information, see Audrey Ekdahl Davidson, ‘The Cividale *Planctus Mariae*: From Manuscript to Modern Performing Edition with Commentary on the Liturgical Context’, in *Le Théâtre et la cité dans l’Europe médiévale*:

The *Planctus* actually encompasses the laments of five individuals: the Virgin herself, Mary Magdalen, two other Marys, and the disciple John. On either side of the stage are two groups, the one of lamenting men and the other of lamenting women. The lamentational clustering reminds us that although laments are often lyric, they may be grouped in such a way as to be dramatized by dialogue. The dramaticity of the *Planctus Mariae*, which was probably to be performed on Good Friday during the adoration of the cross, is brought home vividly by the stage directions, seventy-nine indications of gesture that appear above the lines to which they pertain. Characters beat their breasts eighteen times in lamentation. Other gestures of despair or misery include striking the hands together, dropping the hands limply, putting hands to the eyes, and wiping away tears.⁷⁴

The manuscript of the *Planctus Mariae* is a tour de force of collective grief, designed to bring into congruity the lamentations of at least three communities: the original family and followers of Jesus Christ, the actors and audience of the performances, and the readers of the text who in many cases would eventually become actors in the next re-enactment. The theatrical stagings of the aftermath to the Crucifixion were mimesis taken to an extreme. Other opportunities existed for *imitatio Christi*, both witting and not so, that could result in lamentation.

Even if children died more often than they do now, even if in Europe parents had on average far more children than is the case today, and even if Christianity urged the acceptance and even the embrace of God's providence in taking to himself the young after they had undergone the purification of baptism and before they had impaired their innocence through major sin, the loss of offspring to death was still painful.

A full-throated lament appears in a Carolingian verse legend when the future St Eustathius or Eustasius bemoans the loss of his wife and children.⁷⁵ His comparison of himself to Job is reminiscent of a passage in which Gregory of Tours (540–94) first describes the loss of many young children to an epidemic of

Actes du 1^{re} colloque international de la Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval (Perpignan, juillet 1986), ed. by Jean-Claude Aubailly with Edelgard E. Dubruck, *Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 213 (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1988), pp. 581–95.

⁷⁴ John Wesley Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 44–45, and Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p. 164.

⁷⁵ Incipit 'Placidus fuit dictus magister militum', strophe 15, line 4 – strophe 17, in *Rhythmi aevi Merovingici et Carolini*, ed. by Karl Strecker, in *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, IV, 2, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1914), pp. 593–99 (p. 595).

dysentery, then alludes to the tears shed collectively, and finally invokes the prophet (Job 1. 21).⁷⁶

A very common motif of saints' lives is when a child is endangered or even killed, parents lament, and the child is saved or restored to life by the saint. This pattern appears in the play entitled the *Filius Getronis* (Son of Getron).⁷⁷ This play is the final of the four St Nicholas plays in the Fleury Playbook, as is called a codex from the second half of the twelfth century that is preserved in Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 201 (which also contains the *Ordo Rachelis*). The four plays seem to have been performed in the course of celebrations of St Nicholas's Day (6 December). According to the tale, the son of Getron and Euphrosina, Adeodatus, has been taken by the heathen king Marmorinus. In her grief, the mother breaks into a lament that is modelled on Rachel's.⁷⁸ While the parents observe the feast of St Nicholas, the saint himself appears and leads Adeodatus home from captivity.

A similar miracle, but not involving a saint so much as a theatrical performance, is recounted about the enactment of an Easter play at York in the thirteenth century.⁷⁹ The mob of spectators was so numerous that many could not see the performance in front of the church. A boy who wanted to witness the proceedings and clambered up a window fell and lay unconscious, apparently dead. Though his parents sounded a death lament, God wished to provide a testimonial of the scene that was being performed before the church door and resuscitated the child.

A tally of such miracles in the *Acta Sanctorum* would be very high.⁸⁰ To turn to a cluster that has been discussed by Carol Lansing, people from Orvieto recorded laments in conjunction with deaths that elicited miracles from the Franciscan

⁷⁶ *Historiarum libri decem*, v. 34, in *Zehn Bücher Geschichten*, ed. and trans. by Rudolf Buchner, 6th edn, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 2–3, 2 vols (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986), I, 342.

⁷⁷ Nils Holger Petersen, 'A Mutual Lamenting: Mother and Son in *Filius Getronis*', in *Roma, magistra mundi: itineraria culturae medievalis. Mélanges offerts au Père L.E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75^e anniversaire*, ed. by Jacqueline Hamesse, 3 vols (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération des instituts d'études médiévales, 1998), II, 687–701.

⁷⁸ The text (Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L52 'Heu heu heu, michi misere') is analysed by Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, II, 351–60.

⁷⁹ Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, II, 540–41, Appendix D 1.

⁸⁰ *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur: vel à catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur, quae ex Latinis & Graecis* (Antwerp: apud Joannem Mevrsium, 1643–).

Ambrose of Massa (died 1240).⁸¹ For example, after a boy fell from a palace window, his father went to the body and began to wail and call upon Ambrose, and many neighbours gathered to take part in the lamentation.⁸² And the wife of a notary collapsed before many neighbours who had come to the *planctus* for her son.⁸³ Images of the miracles of the saints also show such laments.⁸⁴ For instance Simone Martini (c. 1284–c. 1344) and his workshop painted on an altarpiece (1324, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena) four miracles of Blessed Agostino Novello in which the saint restored to life the victims of fatal accidents. Three of the four unfortunates (or fortunates?) are young children.⁸⁵

Not merely in the liturgy, in reading Scripture, or in hagiography would laments for the dead have been impressed upon the thoughts, imaginations, and memories of those who expressed themselves in Latin. Laments for dead children are common in texts from Graeco-Roman antiquity, and a few appear prominently in poems that enjoyed places of pride in the canon of texts studied minutely in the school curriculum. In fact, the extant glosses and neumatation of these passages makes understandable why Medieval Latin authors were motivated to compose their own refashionings of scenes in which women and men of classical myth and history gave vent to their despondency over the deaths of children.

In Greek culture ritual lament occupied a salient place, with laments belonging to the essential components of hero cults and cults of the dead.⁸⁶ Among those lamented, children had their places. One arresting phenomenon is the salience of laments for children in the voices of women, even — or especially — within texts composed by men for primarily or entirely male audiences.

Greek myth presents many female characters who utter emotional words of lament. A firm basis for the later cultural influence of these laments is laid by their

⁸¹ Lansing, *Passion and Order*, pp. 89–90. Ambrose's Latin designation is Ambrosius Massanus confessor Urbeveteri.

⁸² *Acta sanctorum*, 66 (10 November), cols 578D–579A.

⁸³ *Acta sanctorum*, 66 (10 November), col. 607C.

⁸⁴ Lansing, *Passion and Order*, pp. 90–91, and Silvia Colucci, 'La questione della mortalità infantile e le sue testimonianze nell'arte medievale senese', *Bullettino senese di storia patria*, 110 (2004), 419–51.

⁸⁵ Cathleen S. Hoeniger, 'The Child Miracles in Simone Martini's Beato Agostino Novello Altarpiece', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 65 (2002), 303–24.

⁸⁶ Eugen Reiner, *Die rituelle Totenklage der Griechen*, Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), and (now the locus classicus) Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

appearance in the *Iliad*. The lament designated *gōos* tends to be spoken, with addresses to the dead, panegyric, curses of the killer, and prediction of revenge. Exemplary would be the words of Andromache in *Iliad* 24. 725–75 as she bewails the mistreatment of her husband Hector's corpse by Achilles. Andromache's belongs to a set of three by her for Hector, distributed throughout the epic (the other two are *Iliad* 6. 407–39 and 22. 477–514).⁸⁷ By the quantity and quality of her laments, she is signalled as a virtuoso of the genre. But the wife who laments over her lost husband is only one form of lamentation, with another being that of the mother over the lost child. Thus, in *Iliad* 24 Andromache's lament over Hector is succeeded by those of Hecuba and Helen. Hecuba's laments here and earlier (*Iliad* 22. 431–36) are those of a mother for a son, which correspond to (and overmatch) the lament of her husband Priam for their son.⁸⁸ Another example of parental lament comes to the fore in *Iliad* 18. 52–64, where Thetis mourns for her son Achilles while he is still alive.⁸⁹

Owing to the importance lament held in myth and culture, it was hardly restricted to epic. Another influential genre in which it played a prominent role was tragedy. For instance, Sophocles' *Antigone* contains a final scene in which Creon bemoans his son and spouse (1261–1348), and Euripides' *Hecuba* foregrounds the outcry of Hecuba over her daughter Polyxena (59–60).⁹⁰

From the prominent position that it occupied in canonical literature as well as in cultural practices, lament became a fixture of formal rhetoric. In this regard it bears recalling that the line between lament and complaint (which has embedded within it the telltale element of *planctus*) can be fine to non-existent. A death that provokes a lament may occur under conditions that cry out for retribution, which may take the form of legal action. Thus lament has a potential for forensic dimensions. Or such a death may happen in circumstances or may occasion circumstances that necessitate political deliberation. In such cases lament may brush up against deliberative rhetoric.

⁸⁷ Christos Tsagalis, *Epic Grief: Personal Laments in Homer's Iliad*, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte, 70 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), pp. 118–29 and 129–33.

⁸⁸ Tsagalis, *Epic Grief*, pp. 151–54.

⁸⁹ Tsagalis, *Epic Grief*, pp. 136–37.

⁹⁰ Nicole Loraux, *Les Mères en deuil* (Paris: Seuil, 1990); in English as *Mothers in Mourning*, trans. by Deborah Glassman (London: Routledge, 1992).

The standard elements of classical lament include an introduction, laudation, lamentation proper, description of illness and death, and consolation.⁹¹ In each of these categories *topoi* are to be found, with such predictable commonplaces in lamentation as parents perceiving the deaths of children as being unnatural and looking to an old age in which they will receive no help.⁹² These common elements could border on what is now known as complaint, as when the speaker rails against the cruelties of fate or death itself. Consolation, the final component among these elements, is in some ways in tension with the nature of lament, since consolation could be regarded as being intended to end or displace lament. In this sense, the *De consolazione Philosophiae* of Boethius (c. 480–524) and *De planctu Naturae* of Alan of Lille (c. 1130–1203) stand a world apart.⁹³

One set exercise in rhetorical instruction was to compose laments for the dead. Many of these compositions gave voice to the emotional words of female characters, such as Andromache, Briseis, Dido, Niobe, Medea, and Hypsipyle, in bewailing lost love ones.⁹⁴ The last three of these half dozen mythical women are all mothers who lament dead children. Such exercises in character description were known in rhetoric as *ethopoeia*, less often (but more tellingly) as *pathopoeia*.⁹⁵ The Greek-language rhetorician Aphthonius of Antioch (c. 400 CE) included as his first full example of character description a lament by Niobe for her slain sons and daughters.⁹⁶ John of Sardis (probably first half of the ninth century), also writing

⁹¹ These elements are described in José Esteve-Forriol, *Die Trauer- und Trostgedichte in der römischen Literatur, untersucht nach ihrer Topik und ihrem Motivschatz* (Munich: Schubert, 1962).

⁹² See Bruno Lier, 'Topica carminum sepulcralium latinorum', *Philologus: Zeitschrift für das klassische Altertum*, 62, n.s., 16 (1903), 456–59.

⁹³ Peter von Moos, *Consolatio: Studien zur mittellateinischen Trostliteratur über den Tod und zum Problem der christlichen Trauer*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 3, 4 vols (Munich: Fink, 1971–72).

⁹⁴ See Manfred Kraus, 'Rehearsing the Other Sex: Impersonation of Women in Ancient Classroom Ethopoeia', in *Escuela y literatura en Grecia antigua: actas del simposio internacional, Universidad de Salamanca, 17–19 noviembre de 2004*, ed. by José Antonio Fernández Delgado and others, Collana scientifica (Università degli studi di Cassino): Studi archeologici, artistici, filologici, letterari e storici, 17 (Cassino: Edizioni dell'Università degli studi di Cassino, 2007), pp. 455–68.

⁹⁵ See Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. by Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, and David E. Orton, ed. by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 366–67.

⁹⁶ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata XI*, ed. by Hugo Rabe, *Rhetores Graeci*, 10 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1926; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995), pp. 34–36; trans. by Raymond E. Nadeau in 'The Progymnasmata of Aphthonius in Translation', *Speech Monographs*, 19 (1952), 264–85 (pp. 278–79); trans.

in Greek, recommended laments as a mode of *ethopoeia*, and gave as one of his four laments Medea on the murder of her children.⁹⁷

Since laments of women for sons and daughters who had died were such pronounced elements of Greek literature and rhetoric, it is not unexpected to find them evident also in Latin literature and rhetoric. With epicedia and elegiac consolations on the deaths of *pueri delicati*, it is not easy to gauge how closely the sexualized youths in question would have corresponded to today's conception of children.⁹⁸ Often they seem to anticipate Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, in the 1955 novel by the same name, at least as seen through the eyes of Humbert Humbert, except that they are male. In other cases there can be no doubt that the subjects lamented are children. Some of these laments appear *en passant*. Thus although at one moment in *De bello civili* (On the Civil War) the poet Lucan (39–65 CE) describes the distress of a mother at the loss of a child, his pervasive focus is on the lamentation of a wife for the loss of her husband.⁹⁹

Perhaps the key lament of a woman for a child in Roman literature is that of Hypsipyle of Lemnos for Opheltes (Archemorus), details of whose story appear in Ovid's *Heroides*, Hyginus's *Fables*, and, with greatest subsequent literary impact, Statius's *Thebaid*.¹⁰⁰ Opheltes was the son of Eurydice by King Lycurgus of Nemea.

by Nadeau, and rev. by Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, and Marion Susa, in *Readings from Classical Rhetoric*, ed. by Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, and Marion Sousa (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 281; trans. in *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition Introductory to the Study of Rhetoric. Writings by or attributed to: Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus*, trans. with intro. and notes by George A. Kennedy (Fort Collins: Chez l'auteur, 1999), pp. 90–91.

⁹⁷ *Commentarium in Aphthonii Progymnasmata*, ed. by Hugo Rabe, *Rhetores Graeci*, 15 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928), pp. 205–07.

⁹⁸ For laments on *pueri delicati*, see for example Statius, *Silvae*, II. 1, II. 6, V. 5, in *P. Papini Stati Silvae*, ed. by E. Courtney (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 32–40, 51–55, and 142–146. The phrase is difficult to translate. Joseph Esmond Riddle and Thomas Kerchever Arnold, *A Copious and Critical English-Latin Lexicon, Founded on the German-Latin Dictionary of Dr. Charles Ernest Georges* (London: Longman, 1847), p. 100, render it as 'petted children'.

⁹⁹ Lucan, *De bello civili*, II. 21–28, in *M. Annaei Lucani De bello civili libri X*, ed. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1988), pp. 25–26; see Alison Keith, 'Lament in Lucan's *Bellum civile*', in *Lament*, ed. by Suter, pp. 233–57 (p. 234).

¹⁰⁰ See Ovid, *Epistulae Heroidum*, VI, ed. by Heinrich Dörrie, *Texte und Kommentare*, 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 93–103, and Hyginus, *Fables*, XV, ed. and trans. by Jean-Yves Boriaud (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), p. 26. The episode had resonance in Greek texts as well, such as Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, I. 609–909, ed. and trans. by William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 52–77, and Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, I. 9. 17 and III. 6. 4,

His original name was said to have been changed into Archemorus, in an episode associated with the so-called Seven against Thebes. Upon stopping to find water at Nemea, the seven Argive heroes asked for directions from the nurse of Opheltis, a woman named Hypsipyle, who had been the queen of the island of Lemnos. While she left the child unattended to show them the way to a spring, Opheltis was killed by a serpent. The dead child was found and buried by the Seven. Because the prophet Amphiaraus saw in this accident an omen boding destruction to him and his six companions, they called the child Archemorus ('the beginning of doom') and held in his honour funeral games which became the great athletic festival known as the Nemean games. More important for our purposes, Hypsipyle uttered a great lament for Opheltis that received memorable treatment in Statius's *Thebaid*.¹⁰¹ Her words in the passage in Statius's epic elicited not only close rhetorical analysis but also neumatation.¹⁰²

Mothers were not alone in ruing the loss of children. To take one instance of a father who sorrowed, in Book 8 of Virgil's *Aeneid* King Evander allows his son Pallas to fight against the Rutulians with Aeneas, who treats him like his own son Ascanius. After proving himself a bold warrior in battle, Pallas is eventually killed by Turnus, who takes his baldric as a spoil. Throughout the rest of Book 10, Aeneas is filled with rage at Pallas's death. In search of revenge, he kills first Lausus and then Mezentius. In Book 11 Aeneas grieves as Pallas is prepared for burial. King Evander grieves in turn, upon receiving Pallas's body. At the end of Book 12, Pallas re-enters the epic a final time. As Turnus is finally defeated and begs for his life, Aeneas almost grants forgiveness but then falls into renewed rage upon noticing Pallas's sword-belt. The *Aeneid* ends as its title character kills Turnus in revenge for Pallas's death. In view of Pallas's salient position in the final books of the *Aeneid*, and considering the mention of his father's grief for him, it makes sense that a Medieval Latin author should have imagined a lament on the death of Pallas in the voice of Evander.¹⁰³

in Apollodorus, *The Library*, ed. and trans. by James George Frazer, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1921), I, 98–99 and I, 356–59.

¹⁰¹ *Thebaid* v. 608–16 and *Thebaid* vi. 135–92, ed. and trans. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), I, 314–15 and 336–41.

¹⁰² For the close attention, see Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Nota Bene: Reading Classics and Writing Songs in the Early Middle Ages*, Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 169, 215, 217; for the neumatation, pp. 265, 266, 283.

¹⁰³ Vito Sivo, 'Il *Planctus Evandri de morte Pallantis*', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 20 (1979), 303–12. The *planctus* is Yearley, 'Bibliography of *Planctus*', L31 'Dulcis fili, quem hostili specto cesum dextera'.

Bringing closure to an essay that is itself concerned with the premature terminations of young lives is not an easy task. Under such lugubrious circumstances it would be hard to speak of happy endings. If an optimistic note can be sounded, it is that these deaths moved at least some of the authors to attain an apogee in their poetic creation. The *planctus* by Peter Abelard that gives utterance to the sadness of Jacob for the sons he thinks are dead and of the maidens of Israel for the daughter of Jephthah, the sequence by Notker the Stammerer on Rachel's lament, the lament of the mothers over the slaughter of the Holy Innocents in the *Carmina Burana*, the *Stabat mater*, the sundry *Planctus Mariae* inside and outside Passion plays, and the lament of Hypsipyle that was neumed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries — all of these have been recognized as literary works of the first order, most of them also associated with melodies and performance. These poems transmute one of the most painful human experiences, namely, bereavement of a loved one, into a thing of beauty, and most of them hold out at least implicitly the solace that the loss can lead to redemption.

The specific backgrounds of most Medieval Latin laments for dead children will never be known. Few of them would have had children of their own, but all of them made the imaginative leap of endeavouring to utter the words they would have had if they had had a child and had lost it. Often they took the pretense to an even higher level by assuming the voice of a woman as they brought forth their laments. Through this masquerade they often forced themselves to confront within the immediacy of a mother's heart the hurt that losing a child engenders. In a paradox of their faith, the grief with which they empathized had the potential to redeem them, so long as they used their tears to cleanse themselves. Contrition, as a stage of penance, could lead to salvation; or, to state the matter differently, meditation upon the Passion could engender compassion. The preoccupation of medieval Christianity with the working of miracles has been long recognized. Now it could be said that the religion was equally concerned with the causing of hurt: traumaturgy should take its place alongside thaumaturgy in the array of concepts to be considered and applied in analysing the cultures of the Middle Ages.

THE LANGUAGE OF PHILOMENA'S LAMENT

Susan Small

Percevoir ce qu'une substance signifie, c'est fatalement recourir au découpage de la langue.

Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*

Several longstanding linguistic assumptions have occluded the debate surrounding a particular hermeneutic problem. The problem concerns the meaning of a single word in the penultimate line of a medieval French text, the word *oci*, which occurs twice in succession in line 1467 of the fable of *Philomena* (I here quote the final four lines):

Por les mauvés qu'ele tant het,
Chante au plus doucemant qu'el set
Par le boschage : 'Oci! Oci!'
De PHILOMENA leirai ci.¹

For the problems are thus: 1) Is *oci*, in this context, onomatopoeic, that is, does it represent the song of the nightingale known in modern French as the 'rossignol philomèle'? 2) Is it a form (and, if so, which form?) of the Old French verb, *ocire*

¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Philomena*, lines 1465–68, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans suivis des chansons, avec, en appendice, Philomena*, ed. by Michel Zink ([Paris]: Librairie Générale Française, 1994); 'Her sweetest song comes from her woes | And bitter hatred of her foes. | "oci"! "oci"! sings the nightingale; | And here I'll end Philomena's tale'. I am using Patricia Terry's elegant translation of these lines (*The Honeysuckle and the Hazel Tree: Medieval Stories of Men and Women*, trans. by Patricia Terry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)), with the exception of line 1467, for which the translation, for reasons which will become evident, is my own. Translations of other texts are my own unless otherwise identified.

/ *occire* (to kill)?² 3) Is it some combination of the two? And, finally, 4) can *oci*, in any of these cases, be construed as an element of a language of lament?

The Old French version of the story of Philomena, from which this quotation is taken, is found in Book VI, lines 2183–3855, of the fourteenth century *Ovide moralisé* and consists of four parts: the Introduction (lines 2183–2216), the *Philomena* (lines 2217–3684), the Explanation (lines 3685–3718), and the Allegory (lines 3719–3855). The *Philomena*, which is drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VI. 401–674, and has been attributed (as I shall do here) to Chrétien de Troyes, is, as the Introduction to the story in one of the two fifteenth-century versions of the *Ovide moralisé en prose*, somewhat trenchantly, puts it, the 'Fable du mariage de Thereus et de Proné, et comment il viola sa soeur Philomena et lui couppa la langue' (Fable of the marriage of Tereus and of Procne, and how he raped her sister, Philomena, and cut out her tongue). I say 'trenchantly' because the fable does not, in fact, end there, and it does not end there because if (the admittedly pre-Saussurean) Tereus cuts off Philomena's *langue*, he neglects to cut off her *parole*, as well; that is, he severs, in Philomena, the connection between encoding and utterance (or enunciation) but fails to understand that Philomena's 'despair, | Her weeping and the sounds she made' (lines 864–65), are, as Slavoj Žižek has said of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, inarticulate only as long as she herself remains severed — disconnected — from her own subjectivity. In other words, Tereus subscribes to what Žižek calls 'the standard modernist reading that conceives [them] as the manifestation of a monadic subject, desperate at [her] inability to establish contact with the world, condemned to a solipsistic void'.³ What Tereus does not consider is that Philomena's 'silent scream' might be of another kind altogether, that 'the sounds she made' might be the click of a camera shutter opening, a dangerous, languorous moment of code-switching, a Deleuzian movement from the monadic to the nomadic subject, from the 'stasis' of horror⁴ to the mechanisms and momentum of lament. Simply put, Tereus 'imagines confidently that depriving Philomena of her tongue will effectively prevent her from telling her tale',⁵ and this failure of the imagination unleashes a torrent of images, utterances, and acts that

² Terry translates, "Kill! Kill!" demands the nightingale'.

³ Slavoj Žižek, 'Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears', *October*, 58 (1991), 44–68 (p. 67).

⁴ See Žižek, 'Grimaces of the Real', p. 50, n. 9.

⁵ E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 125.

make the tale up to this point sound not only truncated, but also tame. For Philomena, Saussurean *avant la lettre*, encodes her message in what Sophocles, in his lost play, *Tereus* (see Aristotle, *Poetics* 16. 4), terms 'the voice of the shuttle'; in other words, she takes up shuttle and loom and 'make[s] cloth talk'.⁶ Procne gets the message. The sisters have what Geoffrey Hartmann calls a 'philomel moment' ('the postprophetic moment, when the theme of loss merges with that of voice'),⁷ and then, together, they weave a web of revenge around Procne and Tereus's son, Itys: they ensnare him, they cut him up, and (the medium being the message) they feed him to Tereus. Tereus, of course, failing (again) to recognize the full import of this, his own *moment orale* — a moment, incidentally, of pure Derridean introjection ('C'est ainsi que l'absorption alimentaire, au propre, devient l'introjection au figuré'⁸) — also fails to remain in it. Instead, he flees this scene — this *non-lieu* — of language (Itys as 'la chose innommable') and lament ('deuil ou mélancolie'), and raucously, as a hoopoe, follows 'l'appel de la présence maternelle':⁹ Procne, the swallow searching for her nest, and the nightingale, Philomena, whose cries call us back to the end of Chrétien's story¹⁰ and to the problem with which our essay began: How, knowing Philomena's story, are we to interpret her cries? As onomatopoeia? Injunction? Language? Lament? The answer is not simple. But perhaps, to quote Geoffrey Hartmann again, 'the strength of the end terms depends on our seeing the elided members of the chain (e.g. the full relation of Tereus and Philomena)'.¹¹ And elided members (quite apart from Philomena's tongue and Itys's butchered limbs) there are; indeed, John Lydgate's 'bridde so smal | Syngeth as that she wold *hir-self* disembre' (lines 71–72; my emphasis).¹² For if Chrétien's nightingale was the first to cry *oci* (Ovid's did not), she was not the last; Philomena had a flock of imitators and a flock of interpreters, among them the cuckoo and the nightingale in Sir John Clanvowe's poem (previously attributed to Geoffrey

⁶ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 122.

⁷ Geoffrey H. Hartmann, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 164.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Fors', preface to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Le Verbiage de l'Homme aux loups, précédé de Fors* par Jacques Derrida (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), pp. 7–82 (p. 55).

⁹ Derrida, 'Fors', pp. 57, 56, and 55.

¹⁰ 'Por les mauvés qu'ele tant het, | Chante au plus doucement qu'el set | Par le boschage : "Oci! Oci!" | De PHILOMENA leirai ci.'

¹¹ Hartmann, *Beyond Formalism*, p. 339.

¹² *Lydgate's Minor Poems: The Two Nightingale Poems (A.D. 1446)*, ed. by Otto Glauning, Early English Text Society, e.s., 80 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1900), p. 18.

Chaucer), *The Boke of Cupide, God of Loue*.¹³ And it is with them, for reasons which will soon become apparent, that I shall begin again.

Clanvowe's cuckoo, then, to his nightingale: 'I haue herd the seye, "ocy! ocy!" | Who myght wete what that shulde be?' His nightingale's reply: "'O fole!" quoth she, "wost thou not what that is?"' (lines 124–26). And fools might we be as well, but the questions surrounding the meaning of what the nightingale is saying — rendered variously, in literature, not only as Chrétien's 'oci' and Clanvowe's 'ocy', but also as 'aussi', 'aussy', 'ἴτω', 'Itus', 'occi', 'occy', 'ochi', 'ochij', 'ocyus', 'oti', 'ozi', as the amazingly aggregate 'fy fy fy fy fy, fye, phy, Tereu, tereu, lug, lug, lug, Nêmesis, Nêmesis' in George Gascoigne's 1576 exegesis of his *Complaynte of Phylomene*, and as Michel Rousse's lovely and boldly interpretive modern translation, 'Tu-ue, tu-ue' — are not, as we have seen, foolish ones, nor is the nightingale's response to the cuckoo's incredulity at her interpretation ("What!" quoth she, "thou art out of thy mynde", line 146) either a fatuous or a particularly unexpected one. Neither, indeed, is the question and answer format of the exchange itself; Barbara K. Altmann and R. Burton Palmer, for example, have included Chaucer's *Legend of Philomena* in their anthology of medieval love debate poetry,¹⁴ and Wendy Pfeffer has identified the similar structure of the 'jeu-parti', or party-game debate, in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and many other nightingale poems.¹⁵ In fact, poets and scholars alike have long and lustily re-enacted the scene between the cuckoo and the nightingale: the question (What is the nightingale saying?), the reply (a hermetic hodge-podge), the response (modulations and misgivings), and the rebuttal (Are you out of your mind?); indeed, the shuttlecock — the 'birdie' — has been batted back and forth so many times and feathers so often flown that it seems there can be little left but the parry and thrust of the game itself.

And in this game, literary nightingales have long made (or been) the opening serve; they have trilled, thrilled, tweeted, twittered, squawked, and even ejaculated¹⁶ since Antiquity, and the gloss has been volleyed back with equal variety and verve. One poet translates, 'Soon, oh, soon'. A critic offers, 'Lo, it is I'. Gascoigne parries with the obfuscating

¹³ *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), pp. 33–53.

¹⁴ *An Anthology of Medieval Love Debate Poetry*, ed. by Barbara K. Altmann and R. Barton Palmer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

¹⁵ Wendy Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (New York: Lang, 1985), p. 163.

¹⁶ See Pfeffer, *Change of Philomel*, p. 159.

If it should onley *Iugum* meane
 Or *iugulator* too.
 Some thinke that *Iugum* is
 The *Iug*, she iugleth so,
 But *Iugulator* is the word
 That doubleth al hir woe.¹⁷

Many others, including Raymond Cormier (whose subtitle to his translation of Chrétien's *Philomena* is, incidentally, 'Wild Justice'), go for the jugular, with 'Kill! Kill!'.

Yet, as diverse and disputable as these rejoinders may be, one thing is indisputable: they are divided along hermeneutic and not linguistic lines. In other words, although they all interpret the ἵτω, *Iug*, and *oci* of the literary nightingale differently, they all make two contradictory assumptions: 1) that it represents the song of the nightingale, that is, that it is onomatopoeic; and 2) that it is linguistically interpretable. They all open and then close the onomatopoeic option, in which signification is enclosed within a signifier-signified ellipse, and open a hermeneutic space in which it is a negotiable commodity. Geoffrey Hartmann compares interpretation itself to a game of football: 'You spot a hole and you go through. But first you have to induce that opening',¹⁸ and this is what Philomena understood; with the first stab of her shuttle, she made the cut out of the ellipse in which her muteness trapped her and into a space where the signifier could be renegotiated and the signified thus be understood. (Of course, as Roman Jakobson points out, it is possible to speak with your tongue cut out, but this was not a common belief for the classical or medieval mind.)¹⁹

The movement through this opening — the transition from the onomatopoeic to the linguistic interpretation of the nightingale's song — has, however, always been erratic. If George Gascoigne, in 1576, juggles with its meaning, Otto Glauning, in his 1900 edition of John Lydgate's two nightingale poems, observes that

In medieval literature we meet not infrequently with this imitation of the nightingale's song. The quotations which have come to my knowledge may be divided into two main

¹⁷ George Gascoigne's *The Steele Glas* and *The Complaynt of Phylomene*, ed. by William L. Wallace (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1975), pp. 139–87 (p. 179, lines 715–20).

¹⁸ Hartmann, *Beyond Formalism*, p. 351.

¹⁹ See Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 217.

groups: The poets of the one use ‘ocy’ as an onomatopoeia for her plaintive song, those of the other interpret it as an imperative addressed by the bird to the hearer.²⁰

But he then revises:

Later instances prove that this second group has degenerated and that the idea of ‘ocy’ as an imperative has been effaced by degrees, so that the two groups coincide at last.²¹

However, Glauning, in 1900, spoke too soon. There are indeed, more than a century later, scholars — Lucy E. Cross (on *Clanvowe*), Barbara K. Altmann (on *Christine de Pizan*), Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Francis Gingras (on *Chrétien*), for example — who allow that *oci* / *ocy* can be read as onomatopoeia, but they all allow the interpretive option — reading it as the imperative of the Old French verb, *ocire* (to kill) — as well. There is even a splinter group — Patricia Terry and E. Jane Burns come to mind²² — who add to the imperative interpretation the possibility that *oci* might be a past participle.

And yet, before we counter with the formulaic scepticism (“‘What?’ quoth she, ‘thou art out of thy mynde!’”), let us stop for a moment and retrace the line of linguistic argument which might have served to unpack from the apparently onomatopoeic, mournful, melancholy, and unmotivated call of a bird the size of a shuttlecock the highly motivated imperative to kill.

We must remember, first of all, that ‘motivated’ and ‘unmotivated’ are themselves highly ambiguous terms, not only because the determination of cause in matters of injunction is in itself extremely problematic, but also because their common acceptations are so wildly polysemous — ranging from ‘inspired’ and ‘animated’ to ‘provoked’, ‘impelled’, and ‘inflamed’ for ‘motivated’, and from ‘neutral’, ‘uninvolved’, and ‘indeterminate’ to ‘disaffected’ and ‘cold-blooded’ for ‘unmotivated’ — but also because they are linguistic terms with very specific acceptations regarding the nature of the relationship between sound and meaning. Let me explain. Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Cours de linguistique générale*,²³ attacked onomatopoeia for being somewhat of a lone wolf, a borderline case, a problematic exception to the arbitrary (or ‘unmotivated’) nature of the linguistic sign, that is, to the principle that there is no natural relation between the signifier and what it signifies. Onomatopoeia, which is based on imitation, implies a relation of

²⁰ *Lydgate’s Minor Poems*, ed. by Glauning, p. 35.

²¹ *Lydgate’s Minor Poems*, ed. by Glauning, pp. 37–38.

²² *The Honeysuckle and the Hazel Tree*, trans. by Terry, p. 12; Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 146.

²³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1959), pp. 69–70.

similarity between the two. Jacques Derrida saw in the conventional 'unmotivatedness' of the sign, by contrast, a locus of synthesis 'in which the completely other is announced as such — *without* any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity — within what it is not'.²⁴

André Martinet took up Saussure's arguments,²⁵ claiming that onomatopoeia (like interjection) is marginal in that it exists outside the double articulation which characterizes the structure of language; it challenges the axiomatic relation between the first level of articulation, at which sounds have no meaning, and the second, at which those sounds acquire meaning through their codification within a particular linguistic system, and it does so by proposing a situation in which this relation, which is termed 'arbitrary' or 'unmotivated' in that it derives from a conventional, and not a natural, combination of sound and meaning, can, in fact, be motivated: the phonemes which represent the nightingale's cry may vary from language to language, but this variation is a phonemic and not a semantic function, that is, a function not of their meaning but of their transcription within a particular phonetic system. Thus, while Aristophanes might hear (and, therefore, transcribe) 'ἴτω', Chrétien, 'oci', and Clanvowe, 'ocy', the relationship between the sound and the meaning of what they hear exists independently of any linguistic system; what is being transcribed is always and only a sound, and that sound is always and only the sound the nightingale makes. This is why, as we shall see, Gascoigne's 'fy fy fy fy fy, Tereu, tereu, Iug, Iug, Iug, Nêmesis, Nêmesis' and Michel Rousse's 'tu-ue, tu-ue' constitute hermeneutic problems (and not only for the authors themselves): they are not mere transcriptions; they are interpretations; they pluck onomatopoeia out of the wilderness of the first level of articulation (what Roland Barthes calls 'la zone la plus "motivée" de la langue, la zone des onomatopées'²⁶) and plant it squarely in the highly conventional, highly codified world of the second. In other words, they cross the line between imitation and interpretation. And it is here that the unpacking begins, here that the onomatopoeic *oci* — Godefroy, Greimas, and Tobler-Lommatzsch all give the cry of the nightingale as the *only* meaning for *oci* — can be unravelled as a syntagmatic string of meaning. For finally it is here, in the arbitrary of the double articulation, that the linguistic motivation of a trill changes into the psychological motivation of a killer.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 47, my italics.

²⁵ André Martinet, *Économie des changements phonétiques: traité de phonologie diachronique* (Berne: Francke, 1970), pp. 157–58.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *L'Aventure sémiologique* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p. 49.

Or does it?

It is at this point that we might usefully supplement our observations with the grammatical and semantic information found in dictionaries and grammars of Old French, and begin to answer the questions with which we began our essay: 1) Is *oci* onomatopoeic, i.e. does it represent the song of the nightingale? 2) Is it a form (and, if so, which form?) of the Old French verb, *ocire* / *occire* (to kill)? Or 3) is it some combination of the two?

It would appear at first that the game is over before it has begun. The *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois*, edited by Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, lists, as separate entries, both *occi*, *occi* and *oci*, giving for both the single acception: 'Imitation du chant du rossignol' (Imitation of the song of the nightingale).²⁷ This is the definition also found, as I have mentioned, in Frédéric Godefroy's *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècle* ('*oci*, *occi*, *occy*, cri du rossignol'),²⁸ A. J. Greimas's *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français* ('*oci*, interj. (1175, Chr. de Tr.; onom) Imitation du cri du rossignol'),²⁹ and Adolf Tobler and Eduard Lommatzsch's *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* ('*oci*, interj. *Ruf der Nachtigall*').³⁰ Indeed, Tobler and Lommatzsch cite as their first example line 1467 of the *Philomena*. Even more specific to our purposes is C. Dubois, M. Dubois-Stasse, and G. Lavis's concordance to Chrétien's *Philomena*; article 793 reads '*oci* INTERJECTION' (their emphasis), for which they note one form and two occurrences, both in line 1467 of *Philomena*.³¹

The evidence is, therefore, incontrovertible: *oci* is, in Old French, an onomatopoeic interjection; it is the imitation of the song, cry, or call of the nightingale.

Less clear, however, is the proviso that La Curne de Sainte-Palaye appends to his definition. While Greimas adds a simple quotation from a poem by the

²⁷ Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, *Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage françois; ou Glossaire de la langue françoise depuis son origine jusqu'au siècle de Louis XIV*, 10 vols, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1972), VIII, 73 and 75.

²⁸ Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècle*, 10 vols (Paris: Vieweg, 1881–1902; repr. Geneva: Sklatine, 1982), V, 566.

²⁹ Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français: Le Moyen Âge* (Paris: Larousse Bordas, 1997), p. 419.

³⁰ Adolf Tobler and Eduard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, 12 vols (Berlin: Weidmann; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1925–2008), VI, 970.

³¹ C. Dubois, M. Dubois-Stasse, and G. Lavis, *Chrétien de Troyes: Philomena. Concordances et index établis d'après l'édition C. de Boer* (Liège: Institut de lexicologie française de l'Université de Liège, [n.d.]), p. 136.

thirteenth-century troubadour Raoul de Houdenc — 'Quant j'oi chanter a mes oreilles Le roussignol: "oci", "oci"' (*Meraugis*) — La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, who gives two examples, introduces the first (from an anonymous thirteenth-century song, MS Bouh. fol. 112) as follows: 'Dans l'exemple suivant, "oci" fait allusion au verbe ocire, tuer: Et si orrons le rossignol chanter en l'ausnoi qui dit: oci ceus qui n'ont le cuer gai' (In the following example, 'oci' alludes to the verb *ocire*, to kill). The quotation is from the Montpellier Codex 5.75. 5–10 and is there translated as 'and we'll hear the nightingale sing in the alderwood, saying ki, ki, I kill those who do not have a gay heart'.³² However, if what La Curne de Sainte-Palaye means when he says that 'oci' alludes to the verb *ocire* in these lines is unclear, two things are clear-cut: 1) 'oci' here is onomatopoeic; these lines are from a song, and the 'oci' (the 'ki, ki, I kill') imitates the song of the nightingale within that song; and 2) 'oci' here is metaphorical. These lines are from a love song, namely the *m'ocit*, *m'ocit* two stanzas later: 'Li regart de ses vairs ieus | m'ocit, m'ocit' (A look from her grey eyes is killing me, killing me!) (5.77. 22–23). This use of *ocire* in a figurative sense, also documented in the Champagne dialect by Georges Frédéric Burguy in his *Grammaire de la langue d'oïl; ou, Grammaire des dialectes français au XII^e et XIII^e siècles*³³ is supplanted in Chrétien's *Philomena* by the very literal 'Quant tu ma serour oceïs' (line 980) and 'Qu'ele onques feïst as ocise' (line 983). In the matter of its morphology (*oci*), however, the Montpellier Codex and the *Philomena* coincide.

It is this last point that I should like to take up next, because it takes us from onomatopoeia to interpretation and to the answer to our second question: *oci* is indeed a form of the Old French verb, *ocire*. Which form? Relihan and Stakel translate the *oci* we have noted in the Montpellier Codex as, 'I kill',³⁴ and Claude Buridant, in his *Grammaire nouvelle de l'ancien français*, substantiates this interpretation,³⁵ as does Edmond Faral in his *Petite grammaire de l'ancien français*.³⁶ Is it also, as many prominent scholars claim, the imperative form? Buridant gives the second person singular present indicative form of the verb *ocire* as 'ocis', which

³² *The Montpellier Codex. Part IV: Texts and Translations*, ed. by Hans Tischler, trans. by Joel C. Relihan and Susan Stakel (Madison: A–R Editions, 1985).

³³ Georges Frédéric Burguy, *Grammaire de la langue d'oïl; ou, Grammaire des dialectes français au XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1977), I, 187.

³⁴ *Montpellier Codex. Part IV*, ed. by Relihan and Stakel, p. 227, § 287.

³⁵ Claude Buridant, *Grammaire nouvelle de l'ancien français* (Paris: SEDES, 2001), p. 227.

³⁶ Edmond Faral, *Petite grammaire de l'ancien français* (Paris: Classiques Hachette, 1992), p. 26.

would therefore also be, by implication, the second person singular imperative form of the verb.³⁷ Nelly Andrieux and Emmanuèle Baumgartner note that the substitution of *s* for *z* in the P.2 (second person singular) form of the verb is not ‘pertinente’ in morphological terms.³⁸ However, what is relevant for our purposes is their observation that, ‘*utilisés en fonction d’impératif les P.2 d’indicatif ou de subjonctif présents ne comportent pas systématiquement de -s final; en effet, la situation allocative, dont l’impératif est indissociable, fait du morphème personnel -s une marque redondante*’.³⁹ I will return to the connection between the imperative and the allocutive in a moment; however, there is no question now but that ‘oci’ can be read as an imperative form. Could it also be a past participle? No. Buridant does not give the past participle of *ocire*, but Faral gives it as ‘ocis’, Andrieux and Baumgartner as ‘ocis,e’.⁴⁰ Indeed, these findings hold for the Champagne dialect in which Chrétien wrote. Gérard Taverdet, in the corpus of his *Glossaire de Chrétien de Troyes*, does not include *Philomena*. However, he notes, under the entry “ocirre”, verbe “tuer”,⁴¹ one occurrence of the form *oci* and identifies it, as do Buridant and Faral, as *ind. prés.*

It would seem, therefore, that ‘oci’ is *neither* the imperative ‘Kill!’ nor the past participle ‘Killed!’ of *ocire*, but the first person singular of the present tense ‘I kill’. But the game is not over yet. Pierre-Yves Dufeu cites two occurrences of *oci* in the anonymous twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Li Quatre Livre des Reis*, the first as an example of the ‘Faites X pour que non Y (avec, implicite, la relation non X => Y)’ (Do X in order that not Y (with the relation, implicit, non X = > Y) sequence).⁴² I here quote (and translate) the relevant sections. Dufeu underlines:

Pur ço en va é ‘oci’ é destrui [go and kill and destroy] Amalech é quanque a lui apent. Garde que n’aies merci ne cuveitise de chose nule que il ait, mais ‘oci’ é tue [but kill and slay] humes, femmes, veilz é jufnes, boes, berbiz, chameilz, adnes é quanque i truveras. (XV, 2)

³⁷ Faral, *Petite grammaire*, p. 35, notes that, in Old French, ‘le commandement est exprimé: — à la 2e personne [which he gives as ‘ociz’] par l’impératif, comme aujourd’hui’.

³⁸ Nelly Andrieux and Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *Manuel du français du Moyen Âge*, vol. III: *Systèmes morphologiques de l’ancien français* (Bordeaux: Sobodi, 1983), p. 252.

³⁹ Andrieux and Baumgartner, *Manuel du français du Moyen Âge*, p. 125. My emphasis.

⁴⁰ Faral, *Petite grammaire*, p. 26; Andrieux and Baumgartner, *Manuel du français du Moyen Âge*, p. 198.

⁴¹ Gérard Taverdet, *Glossaire de Chrétien de Troyes* (Dijon: ABELL, 2004), p. 203.

⁴² Pierre-Yves Dufeu, ‘La Séquence injonctive en ancien français’, Cercle Linguistique d’Aix-en-Provence, 2004, <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/wclaix/travaux/travaux_21_struct_dufeu.pdf> [accessed 5 July 2008], p. 4 of 26.

He specifies that 'un même syntagme verbal impératif ("oci")' functions as a link between the two sequences; he identifies the second ('Enveiad tei sur Amalech, si te dist: "Va, oci [Go, kill] les pecheürs de Amalech, é quanque i ad destrui !"' (XV, 18)) as 'une forme de séquence impérative' which operates as a mechanism in the 'découpage de l'énoncé en séquences informatives'.

Clearly, then, the rules have changed, and we are now obliged to recognize 'oci' as an imperative form of *ocire*. However, its function in the découpage of *Philomena* seems less clear. The imperative (a specification of the injunctive) is an allocutive mode; it requires an allocutor (addressee). If we are to interpret the cry of the nightingale, Philomena, as 'Kill! Kill!' we must also be prepared to identify the interlocutor to whom this command is addressed. Moreover, Gérard Moignet, in his *Grammaire de l'ancien français* notes that the imperative in Old French 'sert à l'expression d'une volition immédiate (sans intermédiaire) devant trouver satisfaction dans l'action de l'allocuteur';⁴³ it serves as the expression of an immediate volition — a volition without an intermediary — needing to find satisfaction in the action of the addressee. In other words, if we allow that the nightingale is crying 'Kill! Kill!' we might expect to hear the swallow or the hoopoe (or, perhaps more onomatopoeically, if still ungrammatically, the owl) respond: 'Who? Who?'. This is John Searle's 'world-to-mind direction of fit'; '[i]t is, so to speak, the task of the world to fit the desire'.⁴⁴ It is consistent with what Francis Gingras might term Chrétien's call to murder, 'il semble désormais appeler au meurtre',⁴⁵ but it is distinct from the also imperative immediacy implied in the equation so succinctly expressed by Gingras as 'chanter = tuer' (to sing = to kill),⁴⁶ in which onomatopoeia and interpretation combine in a staccato performative. To say *oci*, *oci* is not only to speak but to act: I sing = I kill. It is the mechanism by which the apparently onomatopoeic, mournful, melancholy, and unmotivated call of a bird the size of a shuttlecock is packed into the grammatical, emotional, and highly motivated imperative to kill.

We earlier identified *oci* as an onomatopoeia in Old French. We can now also identify it both as the imperative and as the first person singular present tense form

⁴³ Gérard Moignet, *Grammaire de l'ancien français: morphologie, syntaxe* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2002), p. 213.

⁴⁴ John R. Searle, *Rationality in Action* (Boston: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 37–38.

⁴⁵ Francis Gingras, 'Aimer hors chant: réinvention de l'amour et invention du "roman"', *Intermédialités*, 4 (2004), 8–43 (p. 31).

⁴⁶ Gingras, 'Aimer hors chant', p. 31.

of the indicative of the verb *ocire*, to kill. Two questions remain to be answered: 1) Is *oci*, in line 1467 of Chrétien's *Philomena*, onomatopoeic or verbal, or is it some combination of the two? And, finally, 2) can it, in any of these cases, be construed as an element of a language of lament?

Our first question can be reformulated as follows: If we return to the Montpellier Codex and pluck out the words *ki, ki, I kill* (the *ki, ki* onomatopoeic, we will recall, and the *I kill* verbal), can we then, without ruffling any feathers, drop them both back down into the mouth of Philomena in what Matthew Arnold (re Procne as nightingale) terms her 'feathery change'? In other words, can line 1467 of *Philomena* read, in English, 'Ki, ki, I kill, sings the nightingale', or must we drop either the onomatopoeic option (and read: I kill, I kill, sings the nightingale) or the verbal (and read: Ki, ki, ki, ki, sings the nightingale)? It is, of course, tempting to opt for 'ki, ki, I kill', if only because 'I kill, I kill, sings the nightingale' sounds so oxymoronic as to seem plausible only if by 'the nightingale' we means one of the members of the punk rock group of the same name, and because 'Ki, ki, ki, ki, sings the nightingale' sounds (as David Rothenburg says of Walter Garstang's poem 'Songs of the Birds', and we might also say of Gascoigne's) 'less like science and more like dadaism'.⁴⁷

Of course, it is not necessary to resort to either punk rockers or dadaists — or, for that matter, to the highly respectable contemporary composer, Peter Maxwell Davies, who put 'mimicking [...] mechanical medieval nightingales' into his 'Eight Songs for a Mad King'⁴⁸ — in order to find the intersection of onomatopoeia and interpretation. We need simply to look to (the albeit also somewhat mad) Edgar Allan Poe, who, as Roman Jakobson reminds us, once said 'que c'est la faculté onomatopoétique virtuellement renfermée dans les sons du mot *nevermore* qui lui a suggéré l'association avec le croassement du corbeau' ('that it was the potential onomatopoeic quality of the sounds of the word *nevermore* which suggested to him its association with the croaking of the raven').⁴⁹ It is, after all, possible that it was the potential onomatopoeic quality of the sounds of the word *oci* (as a form of the verb *ocire*, to kill) which suggested to Chrétien its association with the cry of the nightingale, and not the cry of the nightingale which suggested that the verb form

⁴⁷ David Rothenberg, *Why Birds Sing: One Man's Quest to Solve an Everyday Mystery* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 48.

⁴⁸ Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs for a Mad King: Music-theatre Work for Male Voice and Ensemble* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2005).

⁴⁹ Roman Jakobson, *Six leçons sur le son et le sens* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1976), p. 22; trans. by John Mepham, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 2.

oci might also be onomatopoeic. We shall never know. However, although this *modus operandi* does seem somewhat specious — putting the cry before the bird, as it were — it does have the merit of breaking us out of the ellipsis of signifier / signified similarity which is onomatopoeia. (As Joseph F. Graham notes in his *Onomatopoeitics*, Socrates' *Cratylus* 'argues for [onomatopoeic] imitation as a perfectly direct mode of predication, with similarity as the value of truth'.⁵⁰) Poe, with his 'I betook myself to linking | Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore [...] Meant in croaking "Nevermore"', brings us to the chain of contiguity, which is, as we shall see, something else altogether.

In *Birds in Literature*, Leonard Lutwack claims that George Gascoigne's 'Tereu' and 'jug-jug-jug' are fair Elizabethan equivalents of what we might today hear as 'tiou-tiou-tiou' and 'chook-chook-chook in the nightingale's song'.⁵¹ The units in each of these two strings of phonemes ('Tereu, tiou, tiou, tiou' and 'jug-jug-jug, chook-chook-chook') are what Mario Pei would term near-homophones of each other, that is, words whose phonetic transcription is nearly identical but whose graphic transcription, etymology, and meaning are different.⁵² And indeed, the *Guide des oiseaux chanteurs*, which identifies two species of nightingale — the 'Rossignol progné' (*Luscinia luscinia*) and the 'Rossignol philomèle' (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)⁵³ — records for the former a song of 'chouk' or 'tchouk-tchouk' (which possesses remarkably similar acoustic properties to both 'jug-jug-jug' and 'chouk-chouk-chouk'), and for the latter a cry of alarm with a crescendo 'hu-it', which is oddly (until it is sung in sequence: hu-it, hu-it, hu-it) the phonetic reverse of 'Tereu tereu' and 'tiou-tiou-tiou'. The question then becomes, Is (and if so, how is) *oci* linked to either (or both) of these phonetic chains?

Firstly, the jug-chook-(t)chouk-oci link. If the 'c' in *oci* had been pronounced, in Old French, as a 'k', we might have argued a j-g-ch-tch-k chain of guttural occlusives, but it was not; it was pronounced, until the thirteenth century, before

⁵⁰ Joseph F. Graham, *Onomatopoeitics: Theory of Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 27. See also Plato: *Cratylus*, trans. by C. D. G. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), pp. 72–74, 426c–427d for Socrates' discussion of the relationship between onomatopoeia, imitation, and tongues.

⁵¹ Leonard Lutwack, *Birds in Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 8.

⁵² Mario Pei, *Glossary of Linguistic Terminology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 116.

⁵³ Michael Lohmann, *Guide des oiseaux chanteurs* (avec Extra: CD avec le chant et le cri de chaque espèce), trans. by Monique Scheiss (Aartselaar: Chantecler, 2003), p. 28.

‘i’ or ‘e’ as the affricated ‘ts’ and thereafter (with some overlap) as the dental fricative ‘s’.⁵⁴

The force of this sibilant resemblance, however, also serves to underscore ‘oci’'s inconsonance with the intersimilarity of ‘Tereu tereu’, ‘tiou-tiou-tiou’, and ‘hu-it’. Perhaps the only way to delineate a possible connection is to realign the chain of similarity by separating it (as we did earlier with the lexeme ‘kill’) into several strands, adding threads we have picked up along the way: one strand, this time, phonetic (Tereu tereu, tiou-tiou-tiou, tu-ue, tu-ue), one semantic (tu-ue, tu-ue, occis, occis, kill, kill), and one narrative (Tereu-tu-ue-tu-ue-Tereu).

This *découpage* may be, as Poe would have it, nothing more than ‘linking | Fancy unto fancy’, but the phonetics of onomatopoeia is not an exact science; Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History*, observes that the song of the nightingale

modulatus editur sonus, et nunc continuo spiritu trahitur in longum, nunc variatur inflexo, nunc distinguitur conciso, copulatur intorto, promittitur revocato; infuscatur ex opinato, interdum et secum ipse murmurat, plenus, gravis, acutus, creber, extensus, ubi visum est vibrans — summus, medius, imus; breviterque omnia tam parvulis in faucibus quae tot exquisitis tiliarum tormentis ars hominum excogitavit.

[is given out with modulations, and now is drawn out into a long note with one continuous breath, now varied by managing the breath, now made staccato by checking it, or linked together by prolonging it, or carried on by holding it back; or it is suddenly lowered, and at times sinks into a mere murmur, loud, low, bass, treble, with trills, with long notes, modulated when this seems good — soprano, mezzo, baritone; and briefly all the devices in that tiny throat which human science has devised with all the elaborate mechanism of the flute.]⁵⁵

It is not possible, within the confines of this essay, to construct a rigorous analogy between the nightingale’s elaborate phonological mechanism and its complex semantic and thematic ramifications in *Philomena* — ‘Her song [writes E. Jane Burns], composed of a single word, evokes murder in all the complex ramifications this tale has shown it to possess’⁵⁶ — but perhaps we can begin here to sketch out a rough blueprint.

We can begin by noting that the French translation of Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* uses the verbs *hacher* (*le hache*) and *lancer* (*le lance*) to convey the staccato

⁵⁴ See Joseph E. Price, *Old French on the Web: The History and Literature of Old French and the Early Romance Languages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁵⁵ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, X. XLIII. 81, in *Pliny: Natural History III, Libri VIII–XI*, ed. and trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1947), p. 344.

⁵⁶ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 146.

sharpness of the nightingale's cry; it is a use that is supplemented, in *ocire* (*oci*), by etymology: 'Précisons qu' *ocire* (de **aucidere* < *occidere*, couper et mettre en morceaux) doit dépendre du signifiant, le couteau, l'arme tranchante, le ciseau primordial.'⁵⁷ And if all this carnage suggests an image of Philomena maimed, or Itys lying dead and dismembered, on the killing fields of language, that language is a sort of anti-poetry, emotion recollected in very un-Wordsworthian activity.

It is true that Chrétien elides the violence of Philomena's mutilation that is so vividly described in Ovid:

ille indignantem et nomen patris usque uocantem
luctantemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam
abstulit ense fero. radix micat ultima linguae,
ipsa iacet terraeque tremens immurmurat atrae,
utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,
palpitat et moriens dominae uestigia quarit.

[But he seized her tongue with pincers, as it protested against the outrage, calling ever on the name of her father and struggling to speak, and cut it off with his merciless blade. The mangled root quivers, while the severed tongue lies palpitating on the dark earth, faintly murmuring; and, as the severed tail of a mangled tail of a mangled snake is wont to writhe, it twitches convulsively, and with its last dying movement it seeks its mistress's feet.]⁵⁸

He notes merely, as Terry translates, that 'seizing her tongue, he hacked | Almost half of it out' ('La langue li tret de la gole, | S'an tranche pres de la meitié', lines 854–55), but if most of this 'footage' ends up on the cutting room floor, it is more than made up for by the cold horror of the scene (part of which we have had to cut out here) in which Procne butchers and dismembers Itys in revenge (lines 1324–37, in Terry's translation of Chrétien):

She said that he would soon be dead,
And with this flesh his father fed. [...]
Even as, lovingly, her son
Embraced her, the Devil's will was done.
Pride made her listen to what he said,
And do evil, cut off her child's head
And give it to Philomena. They shared

⁵⁷ Isabelle Weill, 'Garder et tuer, appuyer et payer: étude diachronique de quatre signifiants *lacaniens*', in *Le Signe et la lettre: Hommage à Michel Arrivé*, ed. by Jacques Anis, André Eskénazi, and Jean-François Jeandillou (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), pp. 459–76 (p. 466).

⁵⁸ *P. Ovidi Nasonis. Metamorphoses*, ed. by R. J. Tarrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), VI. 555–60; trans. by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916; 3rd edn rev. by G. P. Gould, 1977).

In the cooking of the meat, prepared
 Not in just one way, but in two:
 Some they put in a pot for stew
 And some they roasted.

For Procne, tranquillity is trumped by activity, poetry by prosody. In the lines immediately preceding this scene, the ties that bind tenderness and dismemberment in an emotional negative imperative — ‘Que mere ne doit son enfent | Ne *ocire* ne desmembrer’ (‘That no mother her child | Should kill or dismember’) (lines 1318–19) — are slashed in the lexical field of dismemberment and remembering: ‘Que mere ne doit son enfent | Ne *ocire* ne desmembrer | Mes quant li prist a remembrer’ (‘That no mother her child | Should kill or dismember | But when the child makes her remember’). This love / duty jam trips an analogical mechanism which operates in simultaneous rewind and fast-forward mode; Procne, seeing Itys, does two things: 1) she flashes back and forth between mental snapshots of Itys and of Tereus, superimposing one’s head upon the other, conflating *chose semblable* and *chose innommable*; and 2) she flashes back to Philomena’s dismemberment and forward to Itys’s own. This is done in the text, as I have noted, by means of prosody (here: rhyme); the shift from remembering to dismembering (*remembrer* | *demembrer*) triggers a flash of metonymic exchange (Itys’s head for that of Tereus; Itys’s head for Philomena’s tongue). And if Chrétien’s words later seem to suggest, for the nightingale, Philomena, a collocation of killing and tranquillity, ‘Chante au plus doucement qu’el set | Par le boschage : “Oci! Oci!”’ (lines 1466–67; my emphasis), we must remember that this is true only if we identify *oci! oci!* as the grammatical imperative, ‘Kill! Kill!’. For if we listen to John Pecham’s thirteenth-century nightingale (in his *Philomena praeuia temporis amoeni*), we hear the same song and the same sweetness, we see the same dismemberment, and yet here the brutality of the imperative becomes what Dennis A. Rohatyn would term a self-referential, self-instantiating, and, above all, self-predicative injunction.⁵⁹ Pecham’s Philomena does not want to kill; after all, as Rohatyn puts it, ‘[a]n imperative would lose its point if the state of affairs that it postulates as a desiderate were already in existence’.⁶⁰ Philomena does not want to kill; she wants to die. I here quote from Pecham’s ‘Philomena praeuia’ and the lovely 1924 translation by William Dobell

Sed cum in meridie sol est in fervore,
 Tunc dirumpit viscera nimio calore.

⁵⁹ Dennis A. Rohatyn, *Two Dogmas of Philosophy and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Philosophy* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), p. 72.

⁶⁰ Rohatyn, *Two Dogmas of Philosophy*, p. 71.

oci, oci clamat illo suo more,
Sique sensu deficit cantus prae labore.

Sic quassato organo huius Philomenae,
Rostro tamen palpitans fit exsanguis pene,
Sed ad nonam veniens moritur iam plene,
Cum totius corporis dirumpuntur venae.

[But, when the rays of noontide sun at their fiercest beat,
Then its heart is rent in twain through excess of heat;
'Soon, oh, soon', it crieth then in its accents sweet;
Spent with song, the singer lies gasping at our feet.

Philomena's music then all in ruin lies,
Yet with palpitating beak still to sing it tries;
Lingering till none is come, at that hour it dies,
As the latest breath of life from its body flies.]⁶¹

Greimas gives the third acceptance of the Old French *ocire* as 'v. réfl. Mourir presque de chagrin',⁶² and Wendy Pfeffer calls Pecham's '*oci, oci*' 'the *homicidal* cry' of the nightingale 'seek[ing] its own death'.⁶³ Interestingly, this suicidal / homicidal death wish was once Procne's, too. In the time warp when she believed that Philomena was dead and not dismembered, she rants against death itself, her mourning a sop to memory: 'en remembrement | d'ire, d'angoisse et de douleur' (lines 998–99). But it is a memory whose focus, like its ethos, will shift as Philomena's death blurs into that of Itys, and Procne, in her ire, anguish, and pain, shuffles between images of herself and Tereus, Philomena and Tereus, Itys and Tereus, until all she can see is Tereus and, in a fit of seemingly twisted transference, decides (as we have seen) that it is Itys who must die.

And this brings us to our final question: Is *oci* an element of a language of lament? Surely, for Procne, mourning the sister Tereus had told her was dead — 'Quant tu ma serour oceïs', line 980; 'Qu'ele onques feïst as ocise', line 984 — it is. Surely, too, her death wish, her cry of 'Mors, quar vien!' ('Death, come to me!') (line 988) echoes that of Pecham's nightingale: '*oci! oci!*' ('Soon, oh, soon!'). Does Procne lament Itys as she once lamented Philomena? Can a woman who tells her son she is going to feed him to his father, who feeds her husband 'thigh of Itys' ('D'Ithis li aporte une hanche') (line 1376) — or, for that matter, Chrétien

⁶¹ Joannes Peckham, *Philomena: a poem . . . The Latin text with an English version by William Dobell* (London: Burns, Oates, 1924) (London, British Library, Shelfmark No. 11408.aaa.67).

⁶² Greimas, *Grand dictionnaire de l'ancien français*, p. 419.

⁶³ Pfeffer, *Change of Philomel*, p. 41; my emphasis.

himself, who, prosodically once again, rhymes 'hanche' with 'blanche', and not the 'blanch' one might expect here: blanch as in parboil or blanch as in recoil, but blanch as in bleach ('Et la nape fu bele e blanche | D'Ithis li aporte une hanche') ('On it a lovely white cloth lies. | She brings him one of Itys's thighs') (lines 1375–76) — be said to truly regret what she (or he) has done?

It is here that we must return to Pecham, for remember that if he, like Chrétien, trawls the lexicon of lament, 'Gemitus, suspiria, lacrymae, lamenta', he too adds food to the mix: 'Gemitus, suspiria, lacrymae, lamenta | Sibi sunt deliciae, cibus, alimenta' ('Moans and sighs, laments and tears now the soul content, | Yielding it a substance with much sweetness blent') (lines 26–27). Or, in other words, 'Moans, sighs, tears, laments | Delicious foods, sweets and condiments'. It could be said, perhaps, that this is merely passion à la Shakespeare, '[t]empering extremities with extreme sweet' (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue: 14), but Procne, embracing Itys, is not (to continue the analogy) Juliet bidding Romeo 'a fair good night' (II. 2. 184) nor is the sweetly singing nightingale Philomena 'the lark that sings so out of tune' (III. 5. 37–38). No; this is the pathetic fallacy at its most seductive: Who could deny a grieving woman the sweetness of a nightingale's song? It is the emotional pull which might lead one, against all grammatical logic and textual evidence, to suggest that 'oci' might be not an imperative to kill but the irrecoverable past of the past participle, that is, a lament for a dead child: 'Killed, killed'. Jeni Williams, in her *Interpreting Nightingales*, notes Plato's refusal to accept this consolation for Philomena, Procne, and Tereus: 'Men, because they are themselves afraid of death, slanderously affirm of the swans that they sing a lament at the last, not considering that no bird sings when cold, or hungry, or in pain, not even the nightingale, nor the swallow, nor yet the hoopoe.'⁶⁴ Or, as John Ciardi, more bluntly, puts it: 'Birds have nothing to say.'⁶⁵

However, we might argue that Philomena is not a bird; she is a woman who has been transformed into a bird, and to argue here that birds have nothing to say is to fail to take into account the most fundamental principle of metamorphosis: that it carries its past into its present. To adapt Caroline Walker Bynum's moving and compelling argument about the transformation of Ovid's Lycaon and Daphne to that of Procne and Philomena: if we see a running woman in one frame and in the

⁶⁴ Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class, and Histories* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 231.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales*, p. 295.

next a swallow or a nightingale, the story stops; our emotions disengage.⁶⁶ No matter how sweet or winsome, a bird is only a bird. The grief and anger come because the swallow was (is?) Procne. The nightingale was (is?) Philomena. 'And [as Walker Bynum would say] I say "was (is?)" because there is no "was" for [swallow] or [nightingale] unless there is an "is". Unless the story is carried in some way in the present body or shape, we do not know what it was. Hence the body carries the story.' This, Chrétien knew; it is a knowledge carried in the lines with which we began our essay: 'pour les mauvés qu'ele tant het, | Chante au plus doucement qu'el set | Par le boschaige: oci! oci! | De Philomena lairai ci' (lines 1465–68).

For perhaps, in the end, this strange and sticky admixture of throats and tongues, phonemes and philomels, language and lament, is simply the sound a tongueless woman makes when she is howling through the mouth of a bird. (The tongues of nightingales, says Pliny, do not end in a point like those of other birds.) Perhaps Chrétien was not playing the language game; perhaps he was simply doing, in the twelfth century, what Roland Barthes, in the twentieth, would call 'writing aloud':

Due allowance being made for the sounds of the language, *writing aloud* is not phonological but phonetic; its aim is not the clarity of messages, the theater of emotions; what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony; the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Shape and Story: Metamorphosis in the Western Tradition', Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC, 22 March 1999.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 66–67.

MARY, MOTHERHOOD, AND THEATRICALITY
IN THE OLD POLISH *LISTEN, DEAR BROTHERS*
AND CHAUCER'S *MAN OF LAW'S TALE*

Anna Czarnowus

In his classic delineation of the panorama of late medieval life, Johann Huizinga in the well-known poetic quotation thus summarizes the relation between merriment and grief: to medieval people 'the contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking'.¹ Consequently, laughter and tears, as expressions of emotional states more readily contrastable than they were presented later in the early modern period, were endowed with the external form of ritualistic gestures. According to Huizinga's diagnosis, in the Middle Ages 'every event, every action, was still embodied in expressive and solemn forms, which raised them to the dignity of a ritual'.² Simultaneously with those of joy, public expressions of grief frequently acquired elaborate forms, highly theatrical in nature. Literary texts provide their modern readers with descriptions of such moments, yet their function appears more complex than that of recording sadness and merely transferring it into writing. Medieval laments respond to grief on the part of their contemporary audiences or give vent to the unbearable misery felt by the speaker, or alternatively they perform both of those functions. Marian lamentations undoubtedly undertake both of those tasks, as they reflect the emotional response of the faithful to Christ's *passio* and the Virgin's *compassio*, concurrently

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¹ See Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Francis Hopman (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), p. 9.

² Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 9.

aiming to affect the audience not yet touched by the suffering, so as to assist them in feeling rather than merely comprehending the pain of the Redeemer and his dolorous mother. The characters in the texts involving such lamentation would automatically act with a degree of theatricality, a quality which, according to Liliana Sikorska, was strongly interconnected with the phenomenon of late medieval affective piety. This piety consisted in what Sikorska calls 'performing the love of God', in emotional responses to Christ's Passion and even theatrical enactment of scenes from his life as it transpired during visions experienced by female mystics.³ The suffering of Mary would thus be replicated in the torment felt by devout Christians, here female rather than male, since affective piety was deemed more easily attainable by women than men, because of such qualities as female emotionality and spiritual weakness, which paradoxically best reflect human fallibility.⁴ Furthermore, the close contact with one's fleshliness that was thought to characterize women rather than men could lead to a fuller capability to imagine and vicariously experience the pain Christ suffered. Hence even though, as Caroline Walker Bynum insists, in accordance with the medieval cognitive system 'male' and 'female' were assigned to the binary categories of 'intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgement/mercy and order/disorder', nonetheless, women were not necessarily underprivileged in terms of their religious experience.⁵

The diversity and popularity of texts describing Mary's grief as provoked by her son's pain has to be attributed to the position of the Virgin in medieval Christianity. Her figure constituted an icon of perfect motherly devotion and peaceful subjection to the divine will, most strongly symbolized by the immaculate conception, but made full by her acceptance of his sacrifice, despite the emotional cost she had to pay for participating in the Passion. Eastern religiosity in particular involved attaching special importance to the figure of the Virgin, but Western European texts also devoted a lot of scope to the role of Mary in the narratives of Jesus's sacrifice. Thus Mary was granted a specific role that she could enact in the 'theatre of salvation', and her representations in literary texts should be viewed in the light

³ Liliana Sikorska, 'Performing the Love of God and the Struggle with the Devil: The "Theatricality" of Medieval Mystical Culture', *Medieval English Studies: Journal of the Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea*, 10 (2002), 55–71.

⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992), p. 149.

⁵ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 151.

of this theatricality, which is inseparable from Marian laments. The theatricality of grief in general, not only maternal sorrow, and the relationship between grief and gender has already been noted and explored by literary historians.⁶ Representations of the Pietà must have entailed such theatricality, regardless of the cultural background from which a given text originated. Among these Marian texts are some written in Old Polish, which may be situated side by side with such masterpieces as certain scenes from *The Canterbury Tales*.⁷ A significant feature that the Old Polish *planctus*⁸ *Listen, Dear Brothers* (alternatively referred to as *The Świętokrzyski Lament* or *The Virgin Mary's Lamentation Beneath the Cross*)⁹ and Constance's speech from *The Man of Law's Tale* share is the theatricality of imagery; the former might even be a work of dramatic provenance, while in Chaucer the character voicing her lament in a dramatic mode retells Mary's suffering in front of her 'audience' and connects her own experience to the Virgin's torment, thus adding a third type of suffering to Christ's passion and Mary's compassion: the compassion of a devout Christian. The issue of space, rendered theatrical and domesticated, becomes central to those two scenes, which are thus made

⁶ The diverse aspects of grief and gender have been explored in, for instance, *Grief and Gender, 700–1700*, ed. by Jennifer C. Vaught, with Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

⁷ The use of the term 'Old Polish' results here from a certain tradition in translation, even though its inadequacy as a term has been indicated by Piotr Wilczek, who insists that for chronological reasons the literature 'should be referred to in English as the "literature of the Early Modern period" or "Early Modern literature"' due to the fact that the text corpus consists of 'Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque literature'; see his "Sarmatians" in the New World: Old Polish Literature in Contemporary American Academic Teaching', in Piotr Wilczek, *(Mis)translation and (Mis)interpretation: Polish Literature in the Context of Cross-Cultural Communication* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2005), pp. 119–27.

⁸ The *planctus* as a genre was a purely medieval development, since in ancient literature only such funereal genres as *nenia*, *epicedium*, *threnody* (*threnos*), and *epitaph* were known. The customary form of a *planctus* was a sequence, a form defined by Izabella Winiarska as 'a lyric liturgical song whose form and composition were specific' in 'Zale Matki Boskiej pod krzyżem' [Laments of the Mother of God under the Cross], in *Teksty staropolskie: Analizy i interpretacje* [Old Polish Texts: Analyses and Interpretations], ed. by Wanda Decyk-Zięba and Stanisław Dubisz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2003), pp. 281–312.

⁹ Michael J. Mikoś translates the alternative titles of the poem as 'The Holy Cross Lament' and 'Laments of the Mother of God under the Cross'; see 'Listen, Dear Brothers', in *Medieval Literature of Poland: An Anthology*, trans. by Michael J. Mikoś, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 82 (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 77–78; all the translations into English used here will come from that anthology.

unexpectedly close to each other due to the foregrounding of the theatrical on which they both depend. Such texts confirm the medieval vision of motherhood as *passio*, hence a condition making it relatively easier for any mother to feel along with the tormented Christ during the Crucifixion.

The popular image of medieval Polish literature remains that of a vast store of materials identified mostly as chronicles and sermons, while representatives of the more 'literary' genres are scarce. Still, there exists a number of poems which distinguish themselves through both their aesthetic value and the complexity of their structure, and *Listen, Dear Brothers* undoubtedly belongs to that group. Even though in ancient literatures hardly any funereal elegies were written, as Grażyna Urban-Godziek insists in her *Renaissance Elegy: Evolution of the Genre in Poland and in Europe*, in medieval Polish literature elegy became an exclusively funereal form,¹⁰ thus adhering to the genre's early medieval definitions.¹¹ The first Polish elegies displayed epic qualities, while later a lyric mood entered the genre, as 'the feelings and the point of view of the lyrical "I" became [its] dominant feature', to quote Urban-Godziek.¹² *Planctuses* must have belonged to the Holy Week liturgy, since they used to be recited below the rood holding the crucified Jesus, but they were not, technically speaking, drama.¹³ Therefore the question of theatricality in *Listen, Dear Brothers* cannot be separated from the debate on the origin and nature of the genre that the sequence we analyse here represents. *Listen, Dear Brothers*, as a poem written probably for the adoration of the cross on Good Friday, situates itself within that tradition.¹⁴ Its source has been identified as apocryphal: it

¹⁰ Grażyna Urban-Godziek, *Elegia renesansowa: Przemiany gatunku w Polsce i w Europie* [The Renaissance Elegy: Evolution of the Genre in Poland and in Europe] (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), p. 29.

¹¹ The definition of the elegy as a literary form expressing sorrow was provided by Isidore de Seville in his *Originum* and subsequently repeated by Vincent de Beauvais in his *Speculum doctrinale*, although the composition of love elegies was not an infrequent phenomenon in other European literatures at the time; see Urban-Godziek, *Elegia renesansowa*, p. 87.

¹² Urban-Godziek, *Elegia renesansowa*, p. 39.

¹³ Still, there also exists the theory that they were fragments of Passion plays, which in Poland were a form preserved in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts containing Latin *Planctus I* and *Planctus II*; see Teresa Michałowska, *Średniowiecze* [The Middle Ages], *Wielka Historia Literatury Polskiej* [The Great History of Polish Literature] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2002), pp. 451–52.

¹⁴ The vast European literary context of *Listen, Dear Brothers* has been indicated by Graciotti; see Sante Graciotti, 'Lament świętokrzyski a planctus Beatae Mariae Virginis' [*The Świętokrzyski Lament and Planctus Beatae Mariae Virginis*], in *Od Lamentu świętokrzyskiego do Adona: Włoskie*

elaborates on the topic known from the *Gesta Pilati* (otherwise known as *Acta Pilati*), a text dating to the second or the fourth century.¹⁵

Since theatricality requires the use of exuberance as an artistic strategy, excess does indeed become one of the dominating principles of *Listen, Dear Brothers*, if one analyses both its text and instructions about the gestures required in various forms of staging the Holy Week liturgy.¹⁶ When referring to the theatricality of *lauda*, Julian Lewański stresses the exaggeration of such gestures as when Mary raises her arms towards the cross or when she embraces the women surrounding her, and, in a vein similar to Huizinga, he attributes such exaggeration to a sensibility distinct from today.¹⁷ Furthermore, the linguistic side of the poem is characterized by exaggeration as the dominating principle, which results in highly charged emotional language. A similarly emotive dimension of the poem manifests itself in the repetitions of the adjective *miły* (which has to be translated as 'dear' even though thereby it loses its association with the noun *miłość* 'love') and *krwawy* 'related to blood' that Michałowska stresses in her interpretation of the text.¹⁸ Furthermore, the very first stanza of the *planctus* is bound to move the audience with the directness of its primary address:

Posłuchajcie, bracia miła,	[Listen, dear brothers,
Kcęć wam skorzyć krwawą głowę;	I want to complain of a cruel murder;
Usłyszycie mój zamętek,	Hear about the sorrow
Jen mi się <z>stał w Wielki Piątek. (lines 1–4)	That befell me on Good Friday.] ¹⁹

The address becomes deeply moving through its straightforwardness: the Virgin intends to direct her complaint about murder to a court-like jury consisting of the

studia o literaturze staropolskiej [From the Świętokrzyski Lament to Adon: Italian Studies on Old Polish Literature], ed. by Giovanna Brogi Bercoff and Teresa Michałowska (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1995), pp. 31–67.

¹⁵ Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, p. 449.

¹⁶ See Julian Lewański, *Dramat i teatr średniowiecza i renesansu w Polsce* [Drama and Theatre of Medieval and Renaissance Poland] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981), p. 24.

¹⁷ Lewański, *Dramat i teatr średniowiecza i renesansu w Polsce*, p. 81.

¹⁸ Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, p. 456.

¹⁹ 'Posłuchajcie, bracia mi'a', in *Chrestomatia staropolska: Teksty do roku 1543* [The Old Polish Chrestomathia: Texts to 1543], ed. by Wiesław Wydra and Wojciech Ryszard Rzepka (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1995), pp. 245–46; all the subsequent line numbers from the original will refer to that edition; for the full text of Michael J. Mikoś's translation, see the Appendix.

'dear brothers' in faith, since that is the sense of the Old Polish *skorzyć*, and the evidence validating her complaint is the 'krwawa głowa' ('bloody head') of her beloved son. The audience of that address thus becomes very material in their presence, while the language used by the speaker produces images whose visual potential is overwhelming. The impressive imagery is enriched by further references to Mary's 'rozkrwawione [...] miłe narodzenie' ('dear son covered with blood') (line 10) and the moment when, in a manner reminiscent of the Nativity scene given the vocabulary of diminution, his 'główka krzywo wisa' ('little head hangs to one side') (line 22), while 'krew [...] płynie' ('blood is flowing') over him (line 23). Thus the fleshliness of Jesus becomes emphasized, both rendering him closer to humans, acutely experiencing their own flesh whenever it leads them to sin, and pointing to the opposite possibility, that of developing their spirituality when the body is subject to pain. What the anonymous author advocates here is not blind fascination with the naturalism of the body in pain on the part of the believers, but rather understanding that affective suffering with Jesus constitutes a straight path to perfecting one's faith and that one's fleshliness may become a path to the direct experience of Christ's torment, and an important religious experience recommended for all his followers.

A number of addressees appear in the monologue: the Virgin's address 'Synku miły i wybrany' ('My little Son') (line 14) and 'Synku' ('dear Son') (line 20) follow each other, while there occurs also the invocation to 'Anjele Gabryjele' ('angel Gabriel') (line 26) and 'miłe i żądne maciory' ('dear and loving mothers') (line 32). The women who share the afflictions of their motherhood with Mary are thus evoked as those whose condition allows them to grieve with her the most fully. The medieval vision of maternity as *passio*, a condition commenced by the distress of childbirth and followed by the anguish inseparable from experiencing the sorrows of one's child, creates a close proximity between the Virgin and all human mothers regardless of the times in which they live. All Christians should suffer when Christ's Passion is being narrated to them or when they meditate on it themselves, but femininity and especially maternity as a condition inalienably connected with physical and emotional anguish render this group of believers particularly apt to perfect their faith through suffering. Therefore, if the monologue in question was indeed a dramatic form, the addressees of that fragment would be both real, such as the 'stary, młody' ('old and young') (line 5) among the audience, and imaginary, as would be the case with the all-encompassing entity of all the mothers able to understand the Virgin's suffering and, more importantly, feel it. The metaphoric audience consisting of all mothers acquires a universal dimension: the mothers could be models of true faith for all other Christians. They are capable of perfect

cognition of the milk and tears that, according to Julia Kristeva, customarily symbolize *Mater dolorosa*.²⁰ Her simultaneous reliving of the Nativity scene and experience of the Passion, which produces a disquieting amalgam of harrowing with domestic images, connects to the idea that all motherhood is the source of interlinked gaiety and sadness. The body, especially the female maternal one, does not function as an obstacle in attaining true salvation. Conversely, corporeality allows one to feel with the Redeemer and his mother more completely.

As for the theatrical elements of the poem, Sante Graciotti views the beginning of the poem as a fragment inviting the readers to the 'imaginary theatre' of Christ's Passion and Mary's compassion. He likens Mary to an actor reciting a *prologus* and then directly entering the scene as the only speaking actress among those who appear in it.²¹ Indeed, as Graciotti states, we have to do here with one theatre within another: Mary addresses her audience as if it was a theatrical one and then enacts the drama of joy and sorrow in the ensuing scenes, which are dramatic due to their timelessness, atemporality, and universality.²² Nevertheless, some scholars question the dramatic origin of the Polish sequence and emphasize its lyric quality. Andrzej Dąbrowka diagnoses the *planctus* as a literary work situated 'on the boundary between lyric and a dramatic monologue'.²³ He propounds the opinion that the anonymous poet focuses on the soul of Mary in despair and not on the outside world, while she remains the one who typifies the sorrow of all the mothers, since for her 'ciężka [...] chwila, krwawa godzin<a>' ('dreadful is this moment and frightful this hour') (line 11).²⁴ Stefan Nieznanowski convincingly diagnoses her state of mind as 'emotional paralysis'.²⁵ The spiritual sphere affects the material one, since the *compassio* results in Mary metaphorically describing the decomposition of her own body: 'sprochniało we mnie ciało i moje wszystkie kości' ('my flesh

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', trans. by Leon Rudiez, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 160–86.

²¹ Graciotti, 'Lament świętokrzyski', p. 52.

²² Graciotti, 'Lament świętokrzyski', p. 50.

²³ Andrzej Dąbrowka, *Średniowiecze: Korzenie* [The Middle Ages: The Roots], *Mała Historia Literatury Polskiej* [A Brief History of Polish Literature] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2005), p. 338.

²⁴ Dąbrowka, *Średniowiecze: Korzenie*, p. 338.

²⁵ Stefan Nieznanowski, 'Średniowieczna liryka religijna: Rekonesans badawczy' [The Medieval Religious Lyric: Research Report], in *Polska liryka religijna* [Polish Religious Lyric], ed. by Stefan Sawicki and Piotr Nowaczyński (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL, 1983), pp. 9–36.

and all my bones have rotted away') (line 31). Consequently, the image of the Virgin undergoes defamiliarization: what was once alive in her died during the agony of her only child. Once the offspring dies, there remains no further use of her body; hence, it is experienced as an entity undergoing gradual decomposition. The visually moving perspective on the maternal life-giving body as subject to decay becomes evocative of the *ars moriendi* tradition, in which living corpses remind the sinners of the corruption of the souls and the future putrefaction of their corporeality. Nevertheless, the dreary prospect of the decomposition of Mary's body dissolves in the light of Christ's imminent Resurrection and of Mary's elevation as the mother of all humanity. In this sense the image is highly theatrical: it includes the joyful past of the Nativity, the dolorous present of the Passion, and the radiant future of the Resurrection in one and the same scene, very probably highly meaningful to the medieval audience accustomed to such simultaneous visualization of the temporal sphere.

As for 'theatricality' understood as a generic phenomenon, Dąbrowka presents arguments against interpreting the poem as a fragment of an unknown Passion play, since he stresses the meditative rather than dramatic quality of the sequence, the lack of chronological order typical of medieval drama, and the situation in which lyric has to be voiced: since Jesus remains silent, his *passio* has to be narrated by another speaker.²⁶ Also Stefan Nieznanowski postulates the lyric quality of the work, even though he indicates its possible function during the Good Friday liturgy.²⁷ Regardless of the poem's origin, the ultimate effect is that of an indelible linking of lyric and dramatic elements related to the question of space. In the first stanza both the physical and the emotional distance between the Virgin and the 'dear brothers' is diminished. Mary is presented as one of many mothers suffering at the death of their children when she utters, 'Jednegociem Syna miała | I tegociem ożała' ('I had only one Son | And I mourn for him') (lines 7–8). The directness of Mary's speech leads to the above-mentioned semi-theatrical situation, in which the audience is beseeched to have pity, 'Pożałuj mię' (line 5), and to join the speaker in the *compassio*. Furthermore, in the stanza to follow the religious and ethnic boundary is discursively created: the image of an infidel Jew, 'Widząc niewiernego Żydowina' (line 12), battering Christ takes on an anti-Judaic element.²⁸ The myth

²⁶ Dąbrowka, *Średniowiecze: Korzenie*, p. 338.

²⁷ Nieznanowski, 'Średniowieczna liryka religijna'.

²⁸ For a discussion of medieval anti-Judaism in, for instance, Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, see Michael Calabrese, 'Performing the Prioress: "Conscience" and Responsibility in Studies of

of deicide is thus perpetuated and a metaphorical boundary established between 'us', the Virgin and her brothers in true faith, and 'them', the infidels who tortured and murdered Christ.²⁹ The dejection of the mother mourning her beloved son produces the effect of space domesticated by the audience's feeling of emotional proximity to the suffering figure, which is strengthened by the introduction of malevolent ethnic others into the image. The poem's medieval listeners are therefore compelled to define themselves in opposition to the threatening others who were allegedly the cause of Jesus's death. Despite the Virgin's holiness elevating her metaphorically, she is rendered both spatially and emotionally closer to those who listen to or read the sequence, while the setting appears to be hostile as it is inhabited by ill-willing ethnic and religious others. Invisible boundaries are created between those who believe in Christ as the Messiah and those who are 'infidels' in the medieval understanding of the term.

As a consequence, semi-theatrical space becomes firstly constructed (through addressing the audience) and then annulled as the Virgin emphasizes her unity with her 'dear brothers' instead of separating herself from those who observe her. Moreover, natural space seems to be of no consequence, even though the topography of the events undergoes concrete delineation: Christ dies in Jerusalem, while the scene of annunciation evoked by the Virgin in her question to the angel Gabriel — 'Gdzie jest ono twe wesele?' ('Where is this great joy of yours?') (line 27) — took place in Nazareth.³⁰ Even though the poem's geographical imagery derives from biblical geography, this does not affect the division into 'us', Jesus's followers, and 'them', the infidels, which happens on purely cultural grounds. The cultural space in *Listen, Dear Brothers* is thus constructed through the interplay of human grief and the possibility of transcendence.³¹ The validity of the cultural space is

Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 44 (2002), 66–91; for anti-Judaism in medieval Latin literature, see Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 69–110.

²⁹ Peterkiewicz insists that the offensive phrase used in the poem derives from the Good Friday prayer *oremus et pro perfidis Judaeis*, which has now been removed from the Roman missal; see Jerzy Peterkiewicz, 'Simultaneity in a Sequence: The Time Pattern of a Mediaeval Poem', in *For Wiktor Weintraub: Essays in Polish Literature, Language, and History Presented on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. by Victor Erlich (Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 1975), pp. 333–44.

³⁰ For a discussion of the East as a geographic and cultural space, see, for instance, Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The 'Travels' of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

³¹ The division into geographic and cultural space has been thoroughly discussed by Teresa Michałowska, who analysed Old Polish poetry using those categories; see Teresa Michałowska,

greater than that of the geographical. Instead of being presented as a holy place, which found its reflection in medieval cartographic representations of the city as the centre of the earth, Jerusalem is displayed as a wilderness where atrocious acts may be directed against humans. According to Paweł Stępień, Christ's Passion unleashes chaos that ravages not only Jerusalem, but also the entire universe.³² Nevertheless, the poem's formal symmetry presages the subsequent domination of order and symbolizes the harmonic nature of the divine plan of salvation.³³ This geographically and culturally remote land is therefore domesticated by the presence of the Virgin, who becomes one of 'us'. The speaker remains a modest figure uttering both her personal truth in the words 'Nie mam ani będę mieć jinego | Jedno ciebie, Synu, na krzyżu rozbitego' ('I do not have nor will I have another one, | Only you, my Son, stretched upon the cross') (lines 37–38) and also the truth of salvation, universal for all Christians. Sante Graciotti emphasizes Mary's modesty, and situates the poem in the vast tradition of medieval *Planctus Beatae Mariae Virginis*, also involving similar representations.³⁴ That quality customarily characterizes representations of Mary in Passion scenes, and in other literary texts of the time it is replicated in the figures of the virtuous women who emulate the Virgin in medieval literature. A similar modesty, apart from the constancy suggested by her name, also distinguishes Constance (or rather 'Custance') from other characters in Chaucer's hagiographic *The Man of Law's Tale*.

Constance is yet another mother forced to occupy hostile space, which makes the character closer to the Virgin as she emerges from the Old Polish *planctus*. Chaucer's heroine is the Roman emperor's daughter, even though her name itself implies Constantinople as her actual place of birth.³⁵ Yet, despite the Byzantine connotations, she is depicted as a representative of Western values, almost sold in

'Świat poetycki: granice wyobraźni (O poezji polskiej XV wieku)' [The Poetic World: Boundaries of the Imagination (On Fifteenth-Century Polish Poetry)], in *Pogranicza i konteksty literatury polskiego średniowiecza* [The Borders and Contexts of Polish Medieval Literature], ed. by Teresa Michałowska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich), pp. 135–68.

³² Paweł Stępień, *Z literatury religijnej polskiego średniowiecza: Studia o czterech tekstach* [From the Religious Literature of the Polish Middle Ages: Studies on Four Texts] (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2003), p. 225.

³³ Stępień, *Z literatury religijnej polskiego średniowiecza*, p. 231.

³⁴ Graciotti, *Lament świętokrzyski*, pp. 31–67.

³⁵ Dorothee Metlitzky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 153.

marriage to the Syrian sultan after he fell in love with her.³⁶ Then, unjustly accused of the Sultan's murder which was in fact committed by his oriental mother, the heroine floats to Northumberland in a rudderless boat.³⁷ Her second 'home' is disturbingly similar to the earlier one in the East.³⁸ Even though in medieval European culture the Orient did not necessarily function as an utter antithesis of the Western world, in Chaucer's tale it constitutes a malevolent setting, and the North of England replicates that pattern.³⁹ Interestingly, the cultural context acquires depth when Constance realizes another level of the history of the place at which she arrives. Once she has accidentally been stranded on the beaches of Northumberland, the reader learns about the unhappy religious prehistory of the place in the following oft-quoted passage:

In al that lond no Cristen dorste route;
 Alle Cristen folk been fled fro that contree
 Thurgh payens, that conquereden al aboute
 The plagis of the north, by lond and see.
 To Walys fledde the Cristyanytee
 Of olde Britons dwellynge in this ile;
 Ther was hir refut for the meene while.

But yet nere Cristene Britons so exiled
 That ther nere somme that in hir priwetee
 Honoured Crist and hethen folk bigiled,
 And ny the castle swiche ther dwelten three. (II. 540–50)⁴⁰

Instead of the Christian conquest of the East that was actually taking place during the crusades in Chaucer's time, a fictitious pagan conquest of Britain is reported

³⁶ The mercantile aspect of the marriage has been emphasized by Carol F. Heffernan; see Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 23–44.

³⁷ The symbolism of the rudderless boat and its relationship with other (literary and visual) representations of the Ship of the Church and the sea have been explored by V. A. Kolve; see Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 297–358.

³⁸ The similarity has been noticed by, for instance, Patricia Clare Ingham in 'Contrapuntal Histories', in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, ed. by Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 47–70.

³⁹ See, for instance, Brenda Deen Schildgen's analysis of space and religion in the Northumbrian part of the plot in her study on religious otherness in Chaucer: *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 48–68.

⁴⁰ All the quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* will come from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

to the readers,⁴¹ while the narrative is temporally set in its aftermath.⁴² As a reaction to the heathen domination, Constance single-handedly conducts the process of conversion among the northerners and allows the persecuted Christians to observe their rituals again.⁴³ Behind the pagan past there lies an almost forgotten Christian culture, whose material remnants are discovered when Constance has to swear she did not murder her friend, Hermengyld. She swears by 'a Britoun book, written with Evaungiles' (II. 666), which is unexpectedly fetched for her. As in *Listen, Dear Brothers*, the ideas of geographical and cultural space diverge, since 'wilderness' as a setting does not entail timeless paganism, while in the tale's 'present' a part of England, Northumbria, appears as dominated by infidels as the Orient. Constance thus 'domesticates' the space of the Other, hence the pagan one, through introducing (or rather reintroducing) Christian elements into it. The religious artefact that the Bible constitutes symbolically restores order in a world otherwise ravaged by the chaos of paganism, which here amounts to a sphere devoid of spirituality.

Nevertheless, the major focus of our attention here is the speech that Constance delivers while she peacefully subjects herself to exile again, this time because of the letter from her husband forged by her second, equally vicious, mother-in-law Donegild. Before setting sail in yet another rudderless boat, this time with her allegedly monstrous, but actually healthy son Maurice, Constance speaks to the crowd of her supporters gathered on the seashore. She addresses her speech to the Virgin Mary, but does not limit herself to merely invoking this intermediary between fallible humans and the forgiving Christ. Consequently, an intriguing situation occurs, especially if one employs the so-called dramatic theory coexisting with other approaches in twentieth-century criticism of *The Canterbury Tales*. This critical approach was espoused by George Lyman Kittredge in his classic 1914 lectures *Chaucer and his Poetry*, in which he maintained that the tales could be read

⁴¹ Kolve views the temporal setting as more realistic: 'the very period when England was converted to Christianity — often at a cost of blood and suffering and shame — and when men's commitment to Christ partook of a corresponding vigor and integrity' (*Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, p. 297).

⁴² Susan Schibanoff remarks that the pre-Christian version of England is put on a par with Islam in 'Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*', *Exemplaria*, 8 (1996), 59–96.

⁴³ For a discussion of Constance's missionary accomplishments, see, for instance, Andrzej Wicher, 'The English Breton Lay and Some Related Tales: Their Relationship to the Tale of Magic' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Łódź, 1986), pp. 181–83.

as dramatic monologues rather than exposition of Chaucer's actual beliefs.⁴⁴ Although in later criticism there appeared voices disclaiming this approach, it remains a useful perspective on the text. Such scholars as Robert M. Jordan or David Benson have questioned unity as the principle observable in each prologue and tale, but it is worth restating here that at least some of the tales were arguably written in accordance with that theatrical strategy.⁴⁵ Thus if certain tellers do indeed deliver soliloquies, the situation in which Constance, the central heroine of one of those tales, speaks becomes doubly intricate in its design. Therefore we might have one dramatic monologue within another in *The Man of Law's Tale*, which testifies further to the tale's possible, and complex, theatricality.

The monologue that Constance delivers constitutes a form of commentary on Mary's lament beneath the cross. Jill Mann calls it 'the literary counterpart of Pietà', since Constance, finding herself in a similar position, addresses the Virgin in relation to the two contexts that were also included in such *planctuses* as *Listen, Dear Brothers*: the Nativity and the Passion.⁴⁶ For Mann, the scene has to be perceived as a literary transposition of the abovementioned visual representations where 'Mary's pity for her dead son, Christ's pity for mankind, and the beholder's pity for their suffering, are realized as a single emotion'.⁴⁷ Constance puts herself in the position of a beholder meditating on the two scenes, the joyous one and the dolorous one. She appears to be more aware of the actual function of the Passion; the Redeemer pitied humanity so greatly that he sacrificed his own life, which created a straight path to holiness for such women as Chaucer's heroine. A similar perspective was naturally missing from Mary's considerations, more suffused with the grief of an anguished mother than the more rational, theologically conscious, considerations of Constance.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the Old Polish sequence Constance's address to the Virgin is not characterized by distorted chronology: the heroine of Chaucer's tale proceeds from the scene of the Nativity, a topic also included in *laudae*, to the Passion scene from the apocrypha. Constance's speech indicates maternity as one

⁴⁴ George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry: Lectures Delivered in 1914 on the Percy Turnbull Memorial Foundation in the Johns Hopkins University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915), pp. 146–218.

⁴⁵ See Robert M. Jordan, *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); see also C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style: Poetic Variety and Contrast in the Canterbury Tales* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), p. 109.

⁴⁷ Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, p. 109.

of the dominant subjects of the tale. The distorted chronology of the medieval Polish *planctus* constituted a device by dint of which the Virgin's emotional turmoil was presented. In contrast, the chronology in Constance's speech is striking for its orderly nature and reflection of the Virgin's life, which confirms the holiness of Chaucer's heroine: she is well versed in the history of salvation since she probably relives it every day in accordance with the principles of affective spirituality. The gestures introductory to the speech evoke the Nativity scene, since Constance lulls her own child to sleep:

Hir litel child lay wepyng in hir arm,
 And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
 'Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm.'
 With that hir coverchief of hir heed she breyde,
 And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
 And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
 And into hevene hire eyen up she caste. (II. 834–40)

A parallelism between the rejection of the Virgin in Bethlehem and Constance's exile becomes discernible here. Both of the women are mothers of infants whom they try to protect from hostile surroundings and indifferent inhabitants. An atmosphere of privacy, and even intimacy, is verbally constructed in the scene above, in accordance with the stereotypical assignment of women to the sphere of domesticity and confinement. Furthermore, as if to enhance the theatrical effect, in the ensuing passage Constance is endowed with a voice of her own, even though she hardly ever speaks in the preceding part of the tale. A lamenting voice was also granted to Mary in *planctuses*; she addressed her complaint to a specific audience, even though she customarily was the subject invoked instead of the speaking one, if one remembers the wealth of prayers to the Virgin, including St Bernard's *Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio* at the end of *The Divine Comedy*.⁴⁸ Passive and mostly silent figures, the Virgin and Constance commence speaking, and thus vocally establish a space of their own in the discourse. In the case of Chaucer's heroine the speech is framed with a context entailing an obvious theatricalization: Constance speaks in front of the 'audience' bidding her farewell and she addresses a variety of speakers, starting with her infant son and ending with her 'housbounde routhelees' (II. 863). Yet, the Virgin remains her primary addressee, as Mary's *compassio* beneath the rood finds a focal position in the highly lyric discourse:

⁴⁸ See Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, in *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 478–80.

'Mooder,' quod she, 'and mayde bright, Marie,
 Sooth is that thurgh wommanes eggement,
 Mankynde was lorn, and damned ay to dye,
 For which thy child was on a croys yrent.
 Thy blissful eyen sawe al his torment;
 Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
 Thy wo and any wo man may sustene.

'Thow sawe thy child yslayn before thyne yen,
 And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!
 Now, lady bright, to whom alle woful cryen,
 Thow glorie of wommanhede, thow faire may,
 Thow haven of refut, brighte sterre of day,
 Rewe on my child, that of thy gentillesse
 Rewest on every reweful in distresse.' (II. 841–54)

Chaucer confirms here his identity of, as David Griffith claims, 'visual poet', whose 'habit of visualizing operates on all levels of his writing and is rooted in minute observation of people, places, and action'.⁴⁹ His outstanding ability to create vivid images with words manifests itself in the parallelism indicated by Constance, experiencing *compassio* with the Virgin, who was subject to acute pain during the Passion as much as her son was.⁵⁰ Nicholas Watson insists that Chaucer indeed 'gives Constance evocatively imagistic prayers to the son and the Virgin'.⁵¹ Here Mary's portrayal is simultaneously that of the mother of all humanity and that of a mother experiencing excruciating anguish since she is compelled to observe the death of her child. Again, as in *Listen, Dear Brothers*, the poem centres on the lyric aspects of the Passion instead of the realistic or even naturalistic description of torture and agony. As Teresa Michałowska observes, mental torment is foregrounded instead of focusing on the physical dimension of pain, which constituted another mode of representing the Passion and was characteristic of the later Middle Ages,⁵² perhaps due to medieval fascination with the carnality (of God and of all humans) as a phenomenon conducive to salvation.⁵³ Constance suffers almost

⁴⁹ David Griffith, 'Visual Culture', in *An Oxford Guide: Chaucer*, ed. by Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 190–207.

⁵⁰ The doctrine of Mary's *compassio* was developed in the eleventh century by Peter Damian; cf. Stępień, *Z literatury religijnej polskiego średniowiecza*, p. 237.

⁵¹ Nicholas Watson, 'Christian Ideologies', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 75–89.

⁵² Michałowska, 'Świat poetycki', pp. 135–68.

⁵³ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 116.

like the Virgin beneath the cross, and the parallelism is established by the speaker herself precisely in the way that she negates it: 'Thow sawe thy child yslayn before thyne yen, | And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!' (II. 848–49). Paradoxically, the denial implies the possibility of comparison, and Constance's statement on the difference between the Virgin and herself may constitute a purely rhetorical act. Constance's lament reproduces that of the Virgin, thus extending the *compassio* even further; Chaucer's heroine pities Jesus outstretched on the rood as well as empathizing with Mary, who is orphaned by her son as if she was indeed, as St Bernard argued, his daughter. Hence what Jerzy Peterkiewicz indicated as 'double passion' characteristic of the medieval lament (*passio Christi* and *compassio Mariae*) metamorphoses into triple passion with Constance's suffering, or even a fourfold link if we include her followers gathered on the seashore and, ultimately, Chaucer's medieval audience.⁵⁴

Mary's complaint could be a point of departure for more general reflection on universal suffering, as could Constance's fear of another exile in a rudderless boat and of the peril that the voyage will bring to her infant son. Her suffering also makes her a representative of all those who suffer due to the instability of the human predicament. Here she becomes more humane than previously, in the episodes where her holiness was overtly signalled, as she appears as another type of a mother helpless before that which is happening to her child. In the two complaints, the Old Polish *planctus* and the dramatic monologue in Chaucer, the women suffer because of their helplessness and inability to protect their children from the perils posed by the outside world, but their anguish cannot be accused of meaninglessness. The grief and sorrow aims to teach a significant lesson to all those who experience it, a lesson both theological and of mundane value. As in other representatives of funereal or elegiac poetry, in the *planctus* and the tale's fragment, torment materializes as an inseparable part of human life, and one whose value for the increase of one's spirituality cannot be underestimated. The joy of the Nativity was transitory, as the sorrow of the mother lamenting over her beloved child followed. Embracing the grief, a grief powerful enough to unite all humans in the sympathy for the dolorous mother and her antecedent (the biblical Mother of all mothers), the plangent voice of a tormented mother thus establishes a symbolic space that is comprehensible to all those who feel compassion for those who experience loss.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Peterkiewicz, 'Simultaneity in a Sequence', pp. 333–44.

⁵⁵ Chaucer criticism includes studies on other instances of 'symbolic space' in his work; see, for example, Joshua R. Eyler and John P. Sexton, 'One More to the Grove: A Note on Symbolic Space in the *Knight's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 40 (2006), 433–38.

Her grief domesticates the exoticized setting of northern England, annulling the otherwise hostile space with an atmosphere suffused with empathy and tamed by tears which are not artificial. A community of mothers establishes itself, and suffering acquires a multidimensional structure: Constance emulates the Virgin, who in turn relived the joy of the Nativity and suffered alongside Christ in the scene beneath the rood, in which the cosmic order was disrupted and then restored.

The theatre of salvation thus appears before the readers of Chaucer's monologue with all its multidimensionality. The figure of a woman, for medieval audiences metaphorically standing for the whole of humanity with all its weaknesses, but also its potential for redemption, does not function here separately: the spirit of the hypothetically sinful (even if actually saint-like) Constance is uplifted by the vision of the impeccable Virgin, who plays the role of an intermediary between humanity and the Saviour. Human beings, here symbolized by a vulnerable young mother, do not have to face the prospect of sin and death alone. They will be assisted by the Virgin, provided they adequately (that is, in the light of affective spirituality, highly emotionally) react to the memory of the Passion and repent for all the evil they committed throughout their lives. Thus the semi-theatrical scenes involving Mary, suffering Jesus, and the compassionate audience, real or imaginary, perform a didactic function, similar to that occurring in morality plays.

In these two texts, the discourse both domesticates the setting and renders the scene theatrical. Nevertheless, Constance's monologue differs from the medieval Polish sequence by being less lyrical and by including a strictly orthodox Christian message: she realizes that death on the cross means redemption for humanity. In contrast, in *Listen, Dear Brothers* the Virgin as one of the characters acting in the drama of salvation struggles with two conflicting perspectives — that of a mother who deems her innocent son's death an injustice and that of the holiest of all saints who intuitively grasps the hidden sense of the Passion. Only the *planctus* is a strictly funereal genre directly involving elegiac elements, while Constance's monologue recapitulates the scene suffused with utmost despair, but cannot be read as its mirror image. The artistry of the speech consists in this repetition with a difference. The final emphasis in Chaucer falls on Mary's function as a go-between uniting humans with the divinity, hence her dejection in the Pietà scene constitutes only a point of departure for the all-encompassing understanding of God's design. The theatricality of the two fragments must have played a didactic role in relation to their respective audiences. Addressing the listeners' and readers' emotions, the two scenes may have been more convincing for them than if they had included merely a theological message; the two texts both strengthened religious convictions in accordance with the principles of affective spirituality. The fact that

women played a specific role in that theatre of salvation was not of minor importance, since their sex rendered them better figures for the formula of feeling with the suffering Christ. Significantly, such theologians as Bernard of Clairvaux postulated the necessity for men to become like women and primarily to emulate the Virgin, since female weakness and emotionality allowed women to perfect their souls more completely in the act of humiliation before the Saviour.⁵⁶

The Old Polish lament and its Middle English, artistically more accomplished, antecedent constitute two distinct attempts to dramatize the Pietà by granting the speaking voice respectively to the Virgin and to Constance — two women struggling with intolerable grief. In *Listen, Dear Brothers*, Mary in a theatrical mode enacts her own suffering to affect her audience, while Chaucer's Constance views her sorrow as an opportunity to meditate on the nature of the Virgin's despair and on Christ's sacrifice. The ideas of estrangement and domestication disconcertingly mingle in the two discourses, while the dramatic expression of loss produces the effect of proximity between the two medieval texts.

⁵⁶ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 36.

Appendix

Listen, dear brothers,
I want to complain of a cruel murder;
Hear about the sorrow
That befell me on Good Friday.

Have pity on me, you old and young,
Because a painful feast day came for me:
I had only one Son
And I mourn for him.

Deep sorrow came over me, a miserable woman,
Seeing my dear son covered with blood.
Dreadful is this moment and frightful this hour,
When I see an infidel Jew
As he beats, tortures my dear Son.

My little Son, dear and loved,
Share your wounds with your mother;
I have always carried you, little Son, in my heart,
And I have also served you faithfully.
Speak to your mother, so that I can be consoled,
Because you are going away from me, my dear hope.

My dear Son, if I had had you down here,
I could have helped you somewhat:
Your little head hangs to one side; I would support it;
Blood is flowing over you; I would wipe it off;
You cry for water; I would give you drink;
But I may not reach your holy body.

O, angel Gabriel,
Where is this great joy of yours,
Of which you promised me so much,
Saying: 'Virgin, you are full of grace!'
And I am full of sorrow and grief.
My flesh and all my bones have rotted away.

Implore God, all you dear and loving mothers,
So you do not see such a sight with your children,
As I, a miserable woman, saw today
With my own, my dear, beautiful Son,
Who suffered such torments, though perfectly innocent.

I do not have nor will I have another one,
Only you, my Son, stretched upon the cross.

(Translated by Michael J. Mikoś)

‘MYTH TO LIVE BY’ IN *SONATORREK*

Joseph Harris

Joseph Campbell regularly expounded his idea that the salvation of modern man lies in finding or resurrecting myths, or simply myth, ‘to live by’.¹ To me this seems a peculiar prescription for contemporary happiness, considering the myths I happen to have encountered. But if we remove the prescriptive stance, by which Campbell constructed himself as a guru catering to our wish to be improved by something just beyond comprehension and catering generally to our civilized discontents² — if we remove this normative and pedagogical stance, Campbell’s description of some aspects of the religious life of premodern man is not out of line with more disengaged students of the mythological side of religion, students such as Jan de Vries, Theodor Gaster, Konrad Preuß, and, most famously, Mircea Eliade. Of course, all these scholars of myth were interested in many other aspects of the field as well, and for Germanic religion other aspects such as the Indo-European background or the reliability of the postconversion evidence must be considered more important. Moreover, despite the unique insights into daily life offered by the sagas, North Germanic material does not often admit us into the inner religious life of real people.

¹ For example, Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (New York: Viking, 1972). The present article is an extensive revision, correction, and updating of Joseph Harris, “Goðsögn sem hjálp til að lifa af” í *Sonatorreki*, in *Heiðin minni: Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. by Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1999), pp. 47–70.

² See the amusing analysis in Robert A. Segal, ‘Joseph Campbell’s Theory of Myth’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44 (1978), 97–114; repr. in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 256–69; also see his *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1987).

But because I come to my reading in comparative mythology burdened by a long-time interest in the tenth-century Icelander Egill Skalla-Grímsson and in his relationship to his god Odin, I am curious about how far Eliade's well-known ideas about the relationship of life to myth might capture Egill's situation and suggest a framework for interpreting the little we understand of Old Norse pagan life in general.³ Before beginning a discussion of Egill's *Sonatorrek* — an amazingly fruitful source of that elusive thing, the pre-Christian mentality, as well as a poem for lovers of poetry — let me further set up the problem, first, by a summary of the view I am identifying with Eliade and, second, by an introductory treatment of Egill and the poem.

In Eliade's meditation on the role of myth in the life of *homo religiosus*, mostly of archaic cultures, Campbell's 'myth to live by' is replaced by 'living myth', Eliade's phrase for the relationship of premodern man to his beliefs.⁴ Myth's role is famously a paradigmatic and recursive one: not *all* human actions, but all the *meaningful* ones, are imitations of a celestial model. Eliade weaves this idea through many publications, especially through what is probably his best-known book, *Cosmos and History*: 'Objects and acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them'; cities, houses, temples, and territories are modelled on celestial archetypes, and this group of 'facts' is elaborated in what Eliade calls the 'symbolism of the Center'.⁵ Especially important, for the Norse material, are Eliade's 'human acts', 'rituals and significant profane gestures', which 'are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning ("in those days", *in illo tempore, ab origine*) by gods, ancestors, or heroes'.⁶

These significant profane actions may present criticism with a vulnerable point, but the problem is only apparent and depends on point of view: 'they [the

³ The 'saga' (here something like a biographically conceived historical novel) of Egill, son of Skalla-Grímr, will be cited from *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933). Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, 'Cosmogonic Myth and "Sacred History"', in his *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 72–87 (pp. 72–73). For concept and phrasing, cf. 'Leben im Mythos' and related wording in Karl Kerényi, *Antike Religion* (Amsterdam: Pantheon, 1940; repr. Munich: Langen Müller, 1971), esp. pp. 20, 40–41.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 4, pp. 6–11, and pp. 12–17.

⁶ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, pp. 4, 5.

significant profane gestures] have undergone a long process of desacralization and have, in modern societies, become profane'; in fact, according to Eliade 'every act which has a definite meaning — hunting [...], games [...], sexuality — in some way participates in the sacred'.⁷ This has a pleasing resonance, an almost Gallic universality, but most of us in the Anglo-Saxon empirical tradition will cringe a little inwardly at the breadth of the claim. The anthropologist Malinowski, for all that his position contained broadly similar functions of myth in premodern life, had cleared a greater space for the profane and science.⁸ Eliade's book goes well beyond this theme, of course, to a profound meditation on the connections of 'living myth' with conceptions of time, history, and fate, but for the problem of human actions, as in the saga of Egill, it is perhaps enough to quote, following Eliade, from Thomas Aquinas: 'haec hominis est perfectio, similitudo Dei'.⁹

Eliade's view of 'living myth', as far as I have summarized it, would have been influenced by early twentieth-century views of myth and ritual, especially as expressed by the so-called Cambridge School, and a late myth-ritualist such as Gaster, though he introduces a terminology of 'real' and 'ideal' that seems more Platonic than religious, stands in broad agreement with Eliade. Gaster's concern with the relationship of myth and ritual (which are, for him, 'cosubstantial') is a version of the Cambridge School's classic problem — to which I would like to return in conclusion.¹⁰ But for now let me summarize the overlapping nature of the myth-ritual problem and Eliade's paradigmatic myth with a quotation from the great historian of Germanic religion. De Vries was quoting one of his own scholarly models on this overlap:

Preuß hat [...] mit vielen ethnologischen Beispielen seine Meinung, daß der Mythos einen notwendigen Bestandteil des Kultes ausmache, gestützt und zwar 'insofern ein Anfang in der Urzeit als notwendig für die Gültigkeit angesehen wird, sei es, daß die höchste Gottheit

⁷ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 28.

⁸ The most relevant essay would be Bronislaw Malinowski, 'Myth in Primitive Psychology' (1926), collected in his *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, intro. by Robert Redfield (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), pp. 93–148 (esp. 96–111, 'The Role of Myth in Life').

⁹ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 32.

¹⁰ Theodor H. Gaster, 'Myth and Story', in *Sacred Narrative*, ed. by Dundes, pp. 110–36 (p. 114); repr. from *Numen*, 1 (1954), 184–212, and Gaster's *Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, foreword by Gilbert Murray (New York: Schuman, 1950). On the myth-ritual theory and the Cambridge School in the context of intellectual history, see, e.g., Robert A. Segal, *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School* (New York: Garland, 1991).

oder ein Heilbringer oder ein einmaliges Ereignis den Anlaß zu dem jetzigen regelmäßigen Geschehen gegeben hat' [...]. Der Mythos gibt also die Berechtigung für alle späteren kultischen oder sozial-religiösen Handlungen, indem er deren Urbild darstellt; sie haben ihre Gültigkeit eben durch ihren Charakter einer Wiederholung urzeitlicher Vorgänge. Deshalb hat der antike Mensch, ob er nun Römer, Griechen oder Germane war, das Bedürfnis alles was er tut auf ein Vorbild zu beziehen, oder wie Ortega y Gasset das so einprägsam formuliert hat: der antike Mensch tritt, ehe er etwas tut, einen Schritt zurück, gleich dem Torero, der zum Todesstoß ausholt. Er sucht in der Vergangenheit ein Vorbild, in das er wie in eine Taucherglocke schöpfen kann, um sich so, zugleich geschützt und entstellt, in das gegenwärtige Problem hineinzustürzen.¹¹

[Preuß [...] supported his opinion that myth is a necessary part of cult with many ethnographic examples — that is, 'insofar as an origin in primordial times is seen as necessary for the validity [of the cult], whether it was the highest deity or a culture hero or a unique occurrence that provides the occasion for the present regular [cult] actions'. Thus [de Vries continues] myth provides the justification for all later cultic or socio-religious acts in that it re-presents their archetype. They have their validity precisely through their character as repetitions of primordial events. For that reason ancient man, whether he was Roman, Greek, or Germanic, had the need to relate everything he did to a model. Or as Ortega y Gasset so memorably formulated it: ancient man, before he does something, steps back a pace like a torero when he draws back his arm for the death thrust. He seeks a model in the past into which he can slide as if into a diving bell, in order, in this way both protected and disguised, to plunge into the present problem.]

Egill, whose life spanned the last century of Norse paganism from about 910 to about 990, is today perhaps the most celebrated of all pagan Icelanders. Readers of the saga, which is usually dated about 1230, typically feel that this is one, and perhaps the only, genuine Viking whom they really know as a rounded figure, warts and all, but this reaction is based on the skill of a Christian saga writer more than two hundred years removed from his subject.¹² Caution is in order, but too much

¹¹ Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), I, 4. De Vries is referring to Konrad Preuss, *Der religiöse Gehalt der Mythen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), p. 31; the citation of Ortega y Gasset is via Kerenyi, *Antike Religion*, pp. 20, 40–41; de Vries also cites Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, at this point.

¹² In a survey of opinion on the authorship of the saga, Carol J. Clover concludes that 'Most scholars now suppose that Snorri [Sturluson] wrote *Egils saga*' but that '[w]e shall never have full proof to that effect'; 'Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, 2nd impr. with new preface (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Medieval Academy of America, 2005), pp. 239–315 (p. 245). More recently Baldur Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen Werken des nordischen Mittelalters* (Reykjavík: Rannsóknastofnun kennaraháskóla Íslands, 1995), esp. pp. 15–17, proceeds

caution is paralysing, and after all Egill did leave a very large corpus of poetry, in which his own voice speaks across the ages, preserved in oral tradition until recorded in writing at various times. Among the few items of Egill's surviving oeuvre that have been *reasonably* suspected of later authorship, *Sonatorrek* does not number — for most scholars.¹³

Egill's twenty-five-stanza response to a series of losses in his family was occasioned by the drowning of his beloved son Bǫðvarr about 961. Genre is always our quickest (but highly imperfect) guide to a 'horizon of expectations', and I would

on the assumption of Snorri's authorship to redate the saga towards the very end of Snorri's life (1241) and comes to important (if controversial) conclusions on its literary-historical position. An earlier work on the latter subject, Bjarni Einarsson, *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1975), mainly argues the 'literary' (in the sense of the 'Icelandic School') origin of the saga. The most recent criticism finds extensive biblical allegory in the saga: Torfi H. Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni – Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag og Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2004) and his articles cited there. In the context of the present study I prefer to avoid the authorship question, if only because Snorri's authorship of both the saga (our source here for pagan life and ritual) and also of the *Prose Edda* (our main source for myth) could raise the problem of a hermeneutic circularity which, while not unimportant, distracts from my main subject. In general, my view of the saga and its sources remains more conservative, close to that of Nordal in his edition of *Egils saga*, who, however, did assign the authorship to Snorri (pp. lxx–xcv).

¹³ *Egils saga*, ed. by Nordal, pp. v–xvi (and pp. xvi–xxv); for a summary judgement to which I would subscribe, see p. vi. On the difficulties of dating and ascription, with some special reference to Egill, see Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Poetry', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Clover and Lindow, pp. 157–96 (esp. pp. 174–75). More recently Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, esp. pp. 98, 99, 105–08, 111–18, and 149–75, has argued that *all* or almost all the verse, including *Sonatorrek*, as well as the prose was written by Snorri himself; and Tulinius, *Skáldið*, seems to agree although he also sees Egill himself as influenced by Christianity. In a posthumous publication, Bjarni Einarsson in his edition of *Egils saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), pp. 186–89 (Afterword), states his opinion that almost all the verse is by the saga author, namely Snorri; this brief account is based on his 'Skáldið í Reykjaholti', in *Eyvindarbók: Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorson, 4 mai 1992*, ed. by Finn Hødnebo and others (Oslo: Institutt for nordistikk og litteraturvitenskap, 1992), pp. 34–40. For linguistic and literary-historical dating of Egill's verse before the twelfth century, see Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Kveðskapur Egils Skallagrímssonar', *Gripla*, 17 (2006), 7–35. The text of *Sonatorrek* cited here is that of Jón Helgason, *Skjaldevers*, Nordisk filologi, ser. A, 12 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), pp. 29–38, with some modifications from the edition in E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 24–41. See also Nordal's edition in *Egils saga*, pp. 246–56, and, especially for religious background, the most recent edition: Jón Hnefíll Aðalsteinsson, *Trúarbugmyndir í Sonatorreki*, Studia Islandica, 57 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2001). The translations from *Sonatorrek* are my modifications of Turville-Petre's.

as a first approximation choose the analytic term 'elegy' to give a modern audience an initial conception of *Sonatorrek*.¹⁴ But *Egils saga* gives it a more exact ethnic genre label, namely *erfíkvæði*. Though this is the only occurrence of this word in the Old Norse corpus, it is clear from the narrative context, etymology, and related words that it designates a type of poem of which *Sonatorrek* is the richest surviving example, the poetic component of the funeral or memorial service for the dead.¹⁵ Bjarne Fidjestøl, the most thorough student of skaldic poetry in our time, took a stricter view of this genre than mine, but the fact that his resulting structural description is too narrow to accommodate Egill's famous poem is alone sufficient to indicate the need for a ritual-based (rather than purely formal) conception.¹⁶ Still, it is hard to disagree when Fidjestøl writes, 'Mit seiner ungewöhnlich persönlichen relig. Haltung ist das *Sonatorrek* ein einzigartiges Lied in der norrönen Dichtung, das nicht restlos in irgendeiner Gattung aufgeht' (With its unusually personal religious approach, *Sonatorrek* is a unique poem in Old Norse literature, one which cannot be assigned in its entirety to any one genre).¹⁷ Other attempts to give *Sonatorrek* a generic habitation and name are even less successful: neither *cri de revolte* against the gods nor *víglysing*, 'declaration of hostilities', comes to terms with the poem's social and personal functions or with its intertextual relations.¹⁸ Commentators have chiefly, and rightly, fastened on its deeply religious

¹⁴ On 'ethnic' and 'analytic' genres, see Dan Ben-Amos, 'Analytic Categories and Ethnic Genres', in *Folklore Genres*, ed. by Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 215–42, and Joseph Harris, 'Genre in the Saga Literature: A Squib', *Scandinavian Studies*, 47 (1975), 427–36.

¹⁵ Joseph Harris, 'Erfíkvæði – Myth, Ritual, Elegy', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions. An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004*, ed. by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere, Vågar till Midgård, 8 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 267–71.

¹⁶ Bjarni Fidjestøl, 'Erfídrápa (Erblied)', in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. by Heinrich Beck and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), VII, 482–86; Harris, 'Erfíkvæði'.

¹⁷ Fidjestøl, 'Erfídrápa (Erblied)', p. 485.

¹⁸ Emile Pons, *Le Thème et le sentiment de la nature dans la poésie anglosaxonne* (Strasbourg: Librairie Istra; [London]: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 53–54, n. 3; Ari C. Bouman, 'Egill Skallagrímsson's Poem Sonatorrek', in his *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1962), pp. 15–40 (p. 18 quoting from A. G. van Hamel, *Yslands Odinsgeiof*, Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, deel 82, series B, 3 (Amsterdam: Noord hollandse uitgeverij, 1936).

'anchoring',¹⁹ the personal insight it offers, and on its uniqueness. Axel Olrik's romantic assessment has proven very quotable:

De stærke Bølger [...] der gaar gennem Egils Sjæl, er et Vendepunkt i nordiske Menneskers Liv. For første Gang bryder Lyrikken frem i sin Vælde; det verdenshistoriske Punkt er naaet, hvor den indre Oplevelse er større end den ydre Daad.²⁰

[The strong waves [of emotion] [...] that run through Egill's soul constitute a turning point in the life of Nordic man. For the first time the lyric breaks through in all its power. The world-historical point has been reached in which inner experience is greater than outer acts.]

Nordal wrote, 'Jafnpersónulegt kvæði var ekki aftur ort á Íslandi fyrr en á 19. öld' (So personal a poem was not composed again in Iceland before the nineteenth century).²¹ The poem has been considered in relation to 'the modern' by van den Toorn,²² pronounced a thousand years ahead of its time by Krause,²³ and lauded as an important marker on the way to modern self-presentation by Misch.²⁴ Without wishing to deny the modernity or, certainly, the appeal of *Sonatorrek*, I would like to associate myself with the salutary reminder in Vilhelm Grønbech's rhapsodic pages on the poem — the reminder that this immediate human intelligibility

¹⁹ Bo Ralph, 'Om tilkomsten av *Sonatorrek*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 91 (1976), 153–65 (p. 154): 'stark religiös förankring' (strongly religious anchoring); cf. Klaus von See, 'Sonatorrek und Hávamál', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 99 (1970), 26–33 (p. 28): 'tieferlebte heidnische Mytengläubigkeit' (deeply experienced faith in heathen myth); Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964–67), I, 166: 'Das *Sonatorrek* steht in der heidnischen Lebensanschauung festgegründet' (*Sonatorrek* stands firmly grounded in the mentality of heathen life).

²⁰ Axel Olrik, *Nordisk Aandsliv i Vikingertid og Tidlig Middelalder* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907), p. 78; quoted approvingly by Bouman, 'Egill Skallagrímsson's Poem *Sonatorrek*', p. 17, and by Wolfgang Krause, 'Egil Skallagrímssons Gedicht "Der Söhne Verlust"', *Die Sammlung: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Erziehung*, 3 (1948), 719–32 (p. 722).

²¹ Sigurður Nordal, 'Átrúnaður Egils Skallagrímssonar', *Skrínir*, 98 (1924), 145–65 (p. 146); repr. in his *Afangar*, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Helgafellsútgáfan, 1943–44), pp. 103–28; and in his *Mannlýsingar*, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Almenna Bókafélagið, 1986), I, 257–276; trans. into Norwegian by Magnus Stefansson in *Islandske streifyls* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1965), pp. 9–30.

²² M. C. van den Toorn, 'Egils *Sonatorrek* als dichterische Leistung', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 77 (1958), 46–59.

²³ Krause, 'Egil Skallagrímssons Gedicht "Der Söhne Verlust"', pp. 726 and 722, and n. 18; the same idea is more moderately expressed in de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, I, 165 and 167.

²⁴ Georg Misch, 'Egil Skallagrímsson: Die Selbstdarstellung des Skalden', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 6 (1928), 199–241.

across the cultural gulf can be only superficial, if not downright misleading.²⁵ Egill's poem may anticipate nineteenth-century lyrical sensibilities, but it, like every work of art, must also be a product of its time.

We distinguish, obviously, between the external history of the poem as reported in the saga — its composition and performance — and its internal structure and contents. In the latter Egill struggles with his pagan faith, especially with his special relationship to Odin, and, I will argue, he assimilates himself as bereaved father to the divine pattern supplied by Odin in the mythology. This imitation of events *in illo tempore* in the spirit of Eliade, though it does not account for everything in the poem, consists especially in sanctioning the presentation of the deceased sons in relation to Baldr's death and of the poet-father's view of the world as like the divine world after the death of Baldr. But before immersing ourselves in the verbal world of Egill's internal *imitatio dei*, let us consider briefly the external account. For I would argue that there is good evidence that the saga's anecdotes around Bǫðvarr's funeral similarly preserve memories of a ritual with mythic sanction.

It is generally recognized that the saga presents Egill in his old age and blindness as like his patron the aged, blind or one-eyed Odin and also like certain Odin heroes, the best known being Starkaðr,²⁶ but we are concerned only with events connected with the death of the favorite son Bǫðvarr. When Egill collected the body on the shore and laid it in the family funeral mound, he so swelled with grief that his clothing burst at the seams.²⁷ He returned to the house at Borg where without a word he went to his bed closet and locked himself in. After several days it became

²⁵ Vilhelm Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons*, trans. by William Worster, 3 vols (London: H. Milford and Oxford University Press, 1931), I, 26–31.

²⁶ See especially Haraldur Bessason, 'Mythological Overlays', in *Sjöttu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, ed. by Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), I, 273–92, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Starkaðr, Loki og Egill Skallagrímsson', in *Sjöttu ritgerðir*, ed. by Pétursson and Kristjánsson, II, 759–68; also Kaaren Grimstad, 'The Giant as a Heroic Model: The Case of Egill and Starkaðr', *Scandinavian Studies*, 48 (1976), 284–98; and cf. Joseph Harris, 'Sacrifice and Guilt in *Sonatorrek*', in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. by Heiko Uecker, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 11 (Berlin: De Gruyter), pp. 173–96 (esp. p. 181, n. 26). See Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, pp. 93–134, for a thorough review of this aspect of the saga.

²⁷ Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas* (Oslo: Aschehoug; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 178, was apparently the first to notice the heroic reference here in the parallel to *Völsunga saga* (chap. 29 from *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*), but Walter Burkert, *Homo necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. by Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 53, puts such aggressive grief rituals in a context deeper than literary allusion.

clear that Egill intended to starve himself to death. His resourceful daughter Þorgerðr was sent for. Stating loudly that she would not eat until she could sup with Freyja, that is die with her father, Þorgerðr convinced Egill to admit her to the bed closet:

‘Faðir, lúk upp hurðinni, vil ek, at vit farim eina leið bæði’ [...] ‘Vel gerðir þú, dóttir, er þú vill fylgja feðr þínum; mikla ást hefir þú sýnt við mik. Hver ván er, at ek muna lifa við harm þenna?’

[‘Father, unlock the door; it is my wish that we both travel the same road’ [...] ‘You do well, daughter, to wish to follow your father; you have shown great love for me. What hope is there that I should live with this grief?’]

But in the darkness she tricked the old man into drinking from a horn, which turned out to contain not water but milk, and so the fast had been broken. Þorgerðr said:

‘Nú eru vit vélt; þetta er mjólk. [...] Hvat skulu vit nú til ráðs taka? lokit er nú þessi ætlan. Nú vilda ek, faðir, at vit lengðim líf okkart, svá at þú mættir yrkja erfikvæði eptir Bqðvar, en ek mun rísta á kefli, en síðan deyjju vit, ef okkr sýnisk.’

[‘We’ve been tricked now: that’s milk! [...] What plan shall we two make now, since this intention is finished? I would wish now, father, that we prolonged our life so that you could compose a funeral poem about Bqðvarr, and I will inscribe it on a rune-stick. But after that we can die if that seems right to us.’]

Egill said it was unlikely that he could compose now, but he began to cheer up as the poem progressed. When it was finished, he recited it to the household, got up from bed, and resumed the high seat. He called the poem *Sonatorrek*, ‘Irreparable Loss of Sons’. Afterward he held a funeral feast according to the old custom.²⁸

In summary, then: An old man has lost his only or most beloved son in a death which cannot be avenged. The old carl takes to his bed to die, and would have died had he not been saved by the soteriological function of his elegy for his son. But this description also fits the episode of *Beowulf* called the Old Man’s Lament and, mutatis mutandis, its framing narrative, the grief and death of Hreðel, king of the Geats. The Hreðel episode is certainly a heroic form of the myth of Baldr’s unavengeable death and Odin’s unfathomable grief,²⁹ but underlying all three

²⁸ *Egils saga*, ed. by Nordal, pp. 243–45, 256–57. The word *torrek* occurs once in a poem of about 1030 where it must refer to loss and not to revenge; see Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis*, 2nd rev. edn (Copenhagen: S.L. Møller, 1931; repr. Copenhagen: Lynge, 1966), s.v.

²⁹ See discussion and references in Joseph Harris, ‘Myth and Meaning in the Rök Inscription’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 2 (2006), 45–109 (pp. 79–82).

stories would seem to be the myth of the first *erfíkvæði* or at least of the narrative situation that produced it. The situation in *Egils saga* has several other parallels from the sagas, and in addition there is an amazing connection between the ideological content of *Sonatorrek* and the *Beowulf* passage that seems to consist in their similar treatment of one and the same gnome, a thought that would seem to belong at the core of paternal mourning.

But since I have already written in detail about these connections and talked about them often before,³⁰ I would on this occasion like to step back and try to articulate a general explanation in the spirit of Eliade. I would hypothesize, then, that since in the mythology the death of Baldr was the archetypal death and the archetypal sacrifice,³¹ the pattern set there by Odin formed the model of paternal grief in real life, at least in circles of Odin worshippers. This hypothesis goes only a little beyond de Vries, but I would add the further conjecture that this is also the mythic model for the funeral elegy — though Snorri and other mythographic sources offer no direct recognition of such an origin. If this hypothesis seems cogent, then the relationship of mythic model and actual ritual acts can be dated as reaching far enough back in time to constitute a distant source of *Beowulf* as a text. What may have been understood of these relationships by the audience of the *Beowulf* poem in Christian Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth, ninth, or tenth century can only be guessed. In any case, the Old Man's Lament seems to come close to representing the myth of the origin of funeral elegy in a direct form. The thirteenth-century texts that report similar ritual behaviour of pre-Christian Icelanders, above all *Egils saga*, would then, according to the hypothesis, be basing themselves here on old, half-understood anecdotes, or on a general knowledge of pre-Christian times, or on both.

Nordal has written brilliantly on Egill's religion, but whether or not we subscribe to his argument that Egill was a convert to Odin worship, the poet certainly composed from within a deep immersion in Odinic myth.³² The poem itself repeatedly echoes the god's words in *Hávamál*, and even Egill's suspicion of his god belongs

³⁰ Joseph Harris, 'A Nativist Approach to *Beowulf*: The Case of Germanic Elegy', in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. by Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), pp. 45–62; Harris, 'Sacrifice and Guilt'; see the latter, p. 174, n. 4, for an account of the age and development of the present article.

³¹ Jan de Vries, 'Der Mythos von Baldrs Tod', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 70 (1955), 41–60.

³² Nordal, 'Átrúnaður', and *Icelandic Culture*, trans. by Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1990), esp. pp. 123–25.

to the milieu of Odin worship.³³ The Odinic language, the ritual occasion of performance, and the situation itself suggest that Egill's own grief was a *re-presentatio* of the first death and grief, that his poem and actions were modelled on a traditional paradigm wherein he cast himself as a shadow of Odin and his lost sons as reflections of Baldr. And we encounter this relationship between myth and life from the very beginning of the poem.

Stanza 1 is built on the idea, echoed in the saga's prose, that Egill has great difficulty in composing or, at least, in beginning his poem:

Miðk erum tregt
tungu at hræra
eðr loptvæi
lióðpundara.

[It is very hard for me to stir my tongue or the steel-yard of the song weigher.]

The difficulty of beginning is first presented somatically and located in the body part usually understood as most responsible for the difference between speech and merely oral sounds, the tongue. Immediately, though, the image is shifted, and the tongue is analogized to an instrument for meting out song as a merchant measures out trade goods such as gold. Probably the merchant's reluctant precision in dispensing his goods is to be understood as paralleling the poet's inertia. In any case, the mercantile metaphor is short-lived, changing in the second half-stanza to a more tradition-based image from the mythology:

era nú vænlegt
um Viðris þýfi
né hógdrægt
ór hugar fylgsni.

[The prospects of the theft of Odin are not hopeful now, nor is it easily drawn from the hiding-place of thought.]

Myth, of course, told a long history of a liquid which at once *was* poetry and *inspired* poetry, and Egill refers here to the moment in the story when Odin stole the mead from its mountain Fort Knox.³⁴

Stanza 2 repeats, in essence, the first stanza's allegory:

Era auðþeystr,
því at ekki veldr,

³³ Von See, 'Sonatorrek und Hávamál'.

³⁴ De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II, 66–73; in connection with Egill, see Bessason, 'Mythological Overlays', pp. 282–89.

hQ fuglegr
ór hyggiu stað
fagnafundr
Friggiar niðia
ár borinn
ór iqtunheimum.

[The joyful find of the kinsmen of Frigg, brought long ago from the world of giants, is not easily moved from the home of thought — heavy grief causes this.]

Here, however, the tone is changed: the betrayal and death entailed in the myth of theft show up in this stanza as the joyful find that poetry has become in the hands of man. In other words, ‘joyful’ is justified by nothing in the mythic life of the gods but is purely anticipatory of the later existence of poetry in the human realm, and the shift from ‘theft’ to ‘find’ is clearly exculpatory for the eventual heirs, the skalds. Rhetorically this move anticipates the conclusion and main idea of the whole poem, the consolation of poetry in st. 24, but it also enacts a direct, not merely paradigmatic, form of the influence of myth on life.

Thus the composition of poetry here on earth in ‘our’ time is metaphorically equated with the action of Odin, god of poets, in primeval times and superhuman worlds. But, as we have already glimpsed, the situation goes beyond allegory and metaphor, for human poetry is actually consubstantial with the divine mead; and the theft ‘long ago’ (*ár*, 2,⁷) happens again in the ‘now’ (*nú*, 1,⁵) of the poem. Elsewhere skalds speak often of composing as vomiting up the mead of poetry,³⁵ just as Odin did near the end of the myth; but whether regurgitating or stealing, the skald goes beyond *imitatio* or drama to the actual reliving of a sacral moment. I hope I will not offend anyone if I recall the relation between life and myth in the Transubstantiation of the Body and Blood of Christ, but I do want to add that *representatio* does subside into a skaldic convention in some poems, especially in later ones.³⁶

³⁵ See Carol J. Clover, ‘Skaldic Sensibility’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 93 (1978), 63–81, who discusses the opening of *Sonatorrek* in similar terms (pp. 71–72).

³⁶ Germane to this discussion is Bo Ralph, ‘En dikt av Steinþórr, islänning’, *Scripta Islandica*, 26 (1975), 46–53 (p. 51); concerning the decline from consubstantiation to convention, Ralph summarizes: ‘Denna identitet tycks vara medveten för skalderna, åtminstone de äldre; i yngre tid används ofta betydligt blekare diktkenningar’ (This identity seems to be a conscious one for the skalds, at least for the older ones; in later times significantly weaker poetic kennings are employed). For a ritual theory of the origin of skaldic verse, especially *erfíkvæði*, see Åke Ohlmarks, ‘Till frågan om den fornnordiska skaldediktningens ursprung’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 57 (1944), 178–207, with consideration of *Sonatorrek* (esp. pp. 188–89).

These stanzas parallel the myth in a less mysterious way too. In his version of the myth Snorri tells us that when the Æsir first learned that Baldr was dead, they could not speak:

Þá er Baldr var fallinn þá fellusk öllum Ásum orðtök ok svá hendr at taka til hans, ok sá hver til annars, ok váru allir með einum hug til þess er unnit hafði verkit. En engi mátti hefna, þar var svá mikill gríðastaðr. En þá er Æsirnir freistuðu at mæla þá var hitt þó fyrr at grátrinn kom upp svá at engi mátti qðrum segja með orðunum frá sínum harmi. En Óðinn bar þeim mun verst þenna skaða sem hann kunni mesta skyn hversu mikil aftaka ok missa Ásunum var í fráfalli Baldrs.³⁷

[When Baldr had fallen, language failed all the gods and hands to reach to him also failed them. And no one could take revenge, so great a sanctuary was it there. But when the gods tried to speak, tears came out instead so that no one could speak his grief to another. But Odin bore this loss worst of them all, for he had the most understanding of how great a diminishment and loss for the gods lay in the death of Baldr.]

The shocked silence of the gods and their difficulty in speaking calls for comparison to both the saga's description of the situation and to the opening of the poem. The saga author knew at least parts of the poem, including the opening, but both the myth and the real-life incident would ultimately be products of the same human psychology. In the poem, however, the emphatic treatment of overcoming silence may be grounded, to a greater degree than expected, in the world of traditional ideas rather than in real life. The modern reader will legitimately think of the slow beginning and sense of effort in Milton's *Lycidas* — similarly an elegy that steers between paradigmatic myth-like conventions, individual thoughts, and patterns from religious myth — but it is important to note that Egill's opening with the difficulty of breaking silence does not seem to be a mere topos of early skaldic verse.³⁸ If anything, skalds were proud of their fluency; the opening of Egill's *Arinbjarnarkviða*, for example, also deals with the topic of beginnings, but emphasizes the skald's readiness with words of praise for a generous lord or friend.

Stanza 3 begins obscurely, apparently continuing the topic of the mead of poetry. It is 'blameless', anticipating the 'immaculate' gift of poetry in the penultimate stanza of the poem. In the second helming of st. 3, this liquid theme

³⁷ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 46 (chap. 48).

³⁸ Clover, 'Skaldic Sensibility', p. 71, cites one partial parallel, also involving grief; and see Harris, 'Nativist Approach', p. 53, for analogues to the saga anecdote: the prehistory of Völur-Steyn's *Qgmundardrápa* can be interpreted as a way of overcoming the difficulty of beginning such a funeral elegy.

modulates into blood from the body of the primordial giant Ymir which originated the seas in the native cosmogony and supplied a kenning for the sea. (The mead of poetry was actually blood mixed with honey.) The quotidian reference is presumably to the stormy waters off Borg where Bǫðvarr drowned,³⁹ but it is literally impossible to distinguish the profane H₂O of the poem's here and now from the sacred referent, the monster's blood *in illo tempore*. (But this stanza is rich and difficult and needs more work.)

Stanzas 4 and 5 are based, I think, mainly on traditional elegiac imagery; though there is a parallel for the lone tree of st. 3 in the Odin poem *Hávamál*,⁴⁰ I do not think that these stanzas contribute to the mythic process we are examining. In sts 8 and 9 the grieving father at Borg is as helpless to effect revenge as were the fathers we noticed in *Beowulf* and as Odin in the mythology. The echoes of Odin are not chiefly verbal but functions of the situation, yet these take on verbal form to some extent: the adjective *gamall* in st. 9 is typical of Odin; the public nature of Egill's 'lack of support' (*gamals þegns / gengileysi*, 9,⁷⁻⁸), played out before 'all the people' (*alþjóð*, 9,⁵), is not in itself an Odinic feature, but in the context of its semantic and structural parallel in st. 15,³⁻⁴ (discussed below), a weaker form of the cosmic drama of st. 15 is perhaps also suggested here; the diction of st. 8 reminds somewhat of the language of frustrated hostility in *Lokasenna*, though not of Odin's share only. Perhaps what deserves emphasis here is the sheer fact of narrative invention behind Egill's grief. Revenge poses an insoluble problem to Odin, Hreðel, and the Old Man of *Beowulf*. This supplies Egill with precedent for seeking out in imagination unreachable foes, the sea god and goddess, and in a sense the mythic model creates the helplessness of the historical man. Logically, even logically within Egill's cultural *sitz-im-leben*, other postures towards loss of a son would have been possible, but Egill needed to see himself as following the sacred pattern.

Turning to the figure of Baldr, we find that Magnus Olsen has cleared the way by demonstrating convincingly the profound and moving projection of another early *erfíkvæði*, *Hákonarmál* (c. 961), against the background of the Baldr myth, and Olsen offers also a somewhat less certain allusion to this myth in a later Christian

³⁹ Hallvard Lie, 'Sonatorrek str. 1-4', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 61 (1946), 182-207, seems to reduce the metaphorical referent to this realistic meaning; in any case I cannot subscribe to his transposition of st. 3 to follow 4.

⁴⁰ *Hávamál*, st. 50; cf. *Guðrúnarkviða II*, st. 40; *Hamðismál*, st. 5, among other analogues. Eddic poems are cited from *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by Gustav Neckel, 4th edn, rev. by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), here pp. 24, 230, and 269.

erfíkvæði for Saint Ólafr by Sighvatr (c. 1040).⁴¹ This pattern demands to be extended to include the two other most important royal *erfíkvæði* of the pre-Christian and early Christian period, and for that reason I must briefly digress from *Sonatorrek*. In the earliest of these royal funeral poems, the fragmentary *Eiríksmál* (c. 954), the dead king is assimilated to Baldr as he arrives in Valhalla, while the third poem in this sequence, Hallfreðr vandræðaskald’s *erfídrápa* for King Ólafr Tryggvason, despite its Christian setting in 1001, stands in a direct line of development from the pagan *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, although Hallfreðr’s Baldr allusions are more oblique.⁴²

The ‘backstory’ of *Eiríksmál* is well known: how the fratricidal older son of Haraldr Hairfair was expelled from Norway after the return from England of his younger Christian half-brother Hákon Fosterson-of-Athelstan; how about 948 Eiríkr Blood-Axe was compensated with the Norse kingdom of Northumberland under the English king; how the warlike Eiríkr raided in English lands and was killed in battle in 954; finally how in the same year his widow, Gunnhildr, commissioned an unknown skald to compose a poem about him (*yrkja kvæði um hann*), presumably for his funeral.⁴³ Like his direct imitator, Eyvindr skaldaspillir, poet of the *Hákonarmál*, the *Eiríksmál* poet projected the reception of his king into Valhalla against the background of the Baldr myth. Baldr’s death had been closely connected in the mythology, and presumably in belief, with Ragnarøk, and both of these events were associated with the idea of a return of Baldr to the world of the gods — as, for example, in *Völuspá*, st. 62. In *Eiríksmál*, the poet-god Bragi hears the thunder of armies of the dead riding to Valhalla and draws the false conclusion that it may be Baldr’s return from Hel, but Odin and Bragi both know that to be an impossible thing. Instead the noise is caused by Eiríkr, who has been ‘taken’ by Odin despite and, in fact, because of his greatness as a warrior. For Ragnarøk may not be far away, as Odin hints in a pregnant anacoluthon: ‘því at óvíst er at vita’ (7,³). At the end of the fragment Eiríkr appears in Valhalla with a following of five

⁴¹ Magnus Olsen, ‘Om Balder-digtning og Balder-kultus’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 40 (1924), 148–75, and ‘En iakttagelse vedkommende Balder-diktningen’, in *Studier tillagnade Axel Kock* [= *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, n.s., suppl. to vol. 40] (Lund: Gleerup, 1929), pp. 169–77.

⁴² *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* are cited from Helgason, *Skjaldevers*; references to Hallfreðr’s poetry and other skaldic poems are to *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, vols A.I–II: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*; vols B.I–II: *Rettet tekst* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal; Kristiania: Nordisk forlag, 1912–15).

⁴³ *Fagraskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson together with Ágrip af *Nóregskonunga sögum*, Íslenzk fornrit, 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985), p. 77.

kings (9,¹). The number and identity of these kings have plagued historians from the thirteenth century to the present,⁴⁴ but in the context of *Eiríksmál* and its Baldr myth the five kings could be an allusion to the five armies of dead men which rode over the bridge of Gjallarbrú on the way to Hel on the day of Baldr's funeral, as the *Snorra Edda* reports probably on the basis of lost poems:

Móðguðr er nefnd mæ'r sú er gætir brúarinnar. Hon spurði hann [Hermóð] at nafni eða ætt ok sagði at hinn fyrra dag riðu um brúna fimm fylki dauðra manna.⁴⁵

[The name of the maid who guards the bridge is Móðguðr. She asked Hermóð for his name and lineage and stated that the previous day five armies of dead men had ridden over the bridge.]

Thus while the historical tradition of *Egils saga*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Heimskringla* might tempt us to compare the fratricide Eiríkr 'of the bloody axe' with the brother-killer Hōðr in the myth (or with the warlike Hotherus of Saxo Grammaticus's parallel tale), the pro-Eiríkr tradition of the memorial poem seems to cast his death and entry into Valhalla against the archetypal Viking funeral of Baldr, that god's thunderous journey to Hel, and the distant prospect of his return — at Ragnarök. Just as in the *Hákonarmál*, the poetic function of such allusions in *Eiríksmál* would be the assimilation of the dead king to the Baldr schema. This is not, I think, a royal apotheosis in the fullest sense, but an instance of private myth-making that relies on the power of poetry to establish couplings, to make a unity through equivalences. The historical question for the origin of elegy, however, is to what extent the equivalence was traditional and constitutive of the consolatory function.

The third great *erfíkvæði* of the early period is that of Hallfreðr vandræðaskald for King Ólafr Tryggvason. Hallfreðr was nominally a Christian at this time (c. 1001), though notoriously unsteady in his faith, and his poem is, of course, in memory of a Christian king. (But Eiríkr and Hákon were also Christians.) It stands to reason that if there is a Baldr undertone here it will be muted even if — as is obvious — the poem does descend from the tradition of *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*.

⁴⁴ Axel Seeberg, 'Five Kings', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 20 (1978–79), 106–13.

⁴⁵ Snorri, *Edda*, ed. by Faulkes, p. 47. It is regarded as established that this section of *Gylfaginning* (pp. 46–48 (chap. 49)) is based on one or more lost poems; see de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II, 216–17. Also see Franz Rolf Schröder, 'Balder-Probleme', *Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 84 (1963), 319–57. According to *Völsunga saga*, chap. 29 (from the lost poem known as *Meiri*), Sigurd had killed five kings, and it is likely that Brynhildr in this passage has in mind that the five will accompany Sigurd to Hel; cf. *Sigurarkviða in skamma*, sts 60–70 (*Edda*, ed. by Neckel, pp. 216–18), where, according to Brynhildr, five bondmaids and eight noble attendants will follow him in death.

In his last stanza (29), however, Hallfreðr refers fairly directly to the complex of ideas found especially at the conclusion of *Hákonarmál*:

Fyrr mun heimr ok himnar,
hugreifum Áleifi,
(hann vas menskra manna
mest gótt) í tvau bresta,
aðr an, glíkr at góðu,
gæðingr myni fæðask;
kæns hafi Krístr enn hreini
konungs ǫnd ofar lǫndum.

[Heaven and earth will burst in two, before a prince will be born equal in goodness to the courageous Ólafr; he was the most ‘good’ of human men; may Christ the Clean have the soul of the bold king up above the earth.]

Compare *Hákonarmál*, st. 20:

Mun óbundinn
á ýta síqt
Fenrisúlfr fara,
aðr íafngóðr
á auða trǫð
konungmaðr komi.

[The Fenris-Wolf will get free and storm the seats of the gods, before an equally good king will come on the deserted way.]

In both stanzas the thought is this: Ragnarǫk (or the end of the world) will arrive before a king as ‘good’ as this one will come into the world. Thus Hákon and Ólafr are blended with or superimposed upon Baldr, whose return would be signalled by Ragnarǫk but easily became a kind of *adynaton* or impossible occurrence, as in *Eiríksmál*. Notice, too, that Ólafr is conspicuously called ‘the good’ in this stanza and elsewhere in the poem; in fact, Hallfreðr triples his allusion to this word with what might be called *ploce* in classical verse, a play on etymologically related words: *mest gótt*, *glíkr at góðu*, and *gæðingr*. And, as I pointed out, Olsen demonstrated conclusively how this title associated Hákon with Baldr ‘the good’. Though the last two lines are perfectly orthodox in their Christianity, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Hallfreðr has juxtaposed these Baldr allusions to *Krístr enn hreini* through some loose association of the two white gods. In the light of this last stanza, other phrases of Hallfreðr’s *Ólafsdrápa* emerge fairly clearly as allusions to Baldr.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁶ This is not the place for a full analysis, but the phrases that may be thought to cast Hallfreðr’s elegy for Ólafr Tryggvason against the background explored in this article include the following:

poem also seems to have a more personal tone than at first appears. But enough has been said, I hope, to establish the general argument: it appears from the evidence available that the Baldr myth is a fundamental part of the thought-world of early *erfíkvæði* outside *Sonatorrek*. We return now to the Baldr theme in *Sonatorrek*.

Egill's son Bǫðvarr was, like Baldr, innocent and beloved; the Baldr epithet 'the good', however, appears only in the form of negative litotes — a rhetorical strategy that seems characteristic of Egill. The last clause of st. 11 presents problems, but Egill is here basically affirming that Bǫðvarr lacked the makings of an evil man, and everyone (not Egill alone) would have known this fact if Bǫðvarr had been able to grow to manhood:

Veit ek þat síálfr
at í syni mínum
vara ills þegns
efni vaxit,
ef sá randviðr
røskvask næði
unz her-Gauts
hendr of tæki.

[This I know myself that the elements of an evil man had not grown in my son, even if that shield-tree had been able to ripen before the hands of Odin took him.]

This way of expressing Bǫðvarr's goodness compensates for the difference between him and the *positively* good Baldr, who was an adult, and it also apparently serves to establish Odin's theft of Egill's son (though the interpretation of the last two lines is not certain).⁴⁷ The technique of negative litotes is used in connection with Baldr in the Odin poem *Grímnismál* (st.12: Baldr's domain has 'fæstir feiknstafir' (fewest evils)) and again in *Sonatorrek* as I shall mention. Yet Egill's further

st. 10 (cf. the thought of st. 29 and its connections as set forth above); st. 13 (perhaps the same thought with further reference to Ragnarøk); st. 18,⁷⁻⁸ (*góðr gramr*); st. 19 (cf. *Hákonarmál*, sts 20–21); st. 20 (analogy, perhaps to doubts about return from the dead and uncertain news of the dead; cf. *Eiríksmál*); st. 21 (general similarities) and 21,³ (*lýðum frðr ok láði*; cf. *Hákonarmál*, 21,³); st. 22,⁴ (*lestyggs sonar Tryggva*), 22,⁷⁻⁸, and 23,⁷⁻⁸ (cf. the contradiction of false hopes in *Eiríksmál*); st. 25,⁴ (*und lok*; cf. Kveld-Ulfr (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, B.I, 26)) and 25,⁵⁻⁶ (*daudi góðs grams brá gæði ófárar þjóðar*); st. 27,⁶ (*skalm qld*) and 27,⁷⁻⁸ (*flestum es mest vil ok dul vætta virða dróttins*; cf. esp. *Eiríksmál*); st. 28,⁵⁻⁸ (*munk aldri biða bótir*; cf. Harris, 'Nativist Approach').

⁴⁷ On this stanza, see Joseph Harris, 'The Rök Stone through Anglo-Saxon Eyes', in *The Anglo-Saxons and the North*, ed. by Matti Kilpiö and others, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), pp. 11–45 (p. 43, n. 81).

characterization of Þoðvarr is in terms of support in agonistic situations (st. 12), and Egill’s mind goes on in sts 13 and 14 to dwell on his own vulnerability, especially since the loss of his brother. We can deduce from the mythology in general that Egill is reasoning the way the paranoid Odin would in his position, but Egill’s loss is ultimately Odin’s gain, and a gain in kind, namely support in the coming final war. Egill too expects an attack (sts 13–14); in sts 15–18 this mood modulates into a criticism of the decadent present: he trusts no one in the world (st. 15) and likes no one (st. 18); greed has undercut ancient morality (sts 15–16).

The myth offers parallels to this decadence, but before we turn to that, let us consider the reduplication of the Baldr allusion in reference to the death some years earlier of Egill’s other son, Gunnarr: although Gunnarr died of a fever (and not in battle), Egill presents this as another Odinic theft of another Baldr-like son. Stanzas 19–20 may be paraphrased: I have not been able to hold up my head since the vicious fire of sickness snatched from the world the son who avoided evil speech, on his guard against faults. So Gunnarr, again with typical negative litotes, is characterized by his fair speech in ‘avoided evil speech’ (‘varnaði við vāmæli’, 20,^{7–8}), while in myth Baldr is positively ‘the most fair-spoken of the gods and the kindest’ (‘fegrst talaðr ok líknsamastr’).⁴⁸ Gunnarr was also ‘vamma varr’ (on his guard against faults, or against stains). (*Vamm*, like Latin *maculum*, has both a visual and a moral aspect; Turville-Petre’s translation ‘on guard against faults’ can represent only the latter. The emendation of MS *varr* to *vanr* is appealing in view of the same phrase in *Hávamál* 22 and *Lokasenna* 30.) But of Baldr, Snorri reports, ‘there is only good to tell’ (‘gott at segja’); his countenance is so fair and bright that he emits light (‘svá fagr álitum ok bjartr svá at lýsir af honum’). In other words, Egill contrives to compress the moral goodness and the physical whiteness of Baldr into a single, ambiguous phrase.

Baldr’s death ushered in the beginning of the end for the gods; having lost their best and brightest, the Æsir are unsure of themselves, and Odin gathers forces against the coming of the wolf, just as Egill dwells on his vulnerability in an increasingly threatening time. In Egill’s satire on the times in sts 15–16 we seem to hear tones of some pagan analogue of the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday. Among the mythic texts, *Völuspá* 45 is the classic statement of the deterioration of the human condition and the ethical world before the last days:

Bræðr muno beriaz oc at þǫnom verðaz,
muno systrungar sífiom spilla;

⁴⁸ Snorri, *Edda*, p. 23 (chap. 22).

hart er í heimi, hórdómr mikill,
 sceggöld, scálmöld, scildir ro klofnir,
 vindöld, vargöld, áðr verold steypiz;
 mun engi maðr qðrom þyrma.

[Brothers will fight against brothers and become each others' slayers; near kinsmen will shatter the bonds of the family; there will be evil in the world, great whoredom, axe-age, sword-age, when shields will be cleft, wind-age, wolf-age, before the world is destroyed; no man will spare another.]

Egill's kenning for 'anyone' in the context of the decadence he sees around him is *alþjóð Elgiar galga* (15,³⁻⁴), literally meaning the 'whole folk of the gallows of Odin', that is, all the peoples within the cosmic tree Yggdrasill. Instead of using this high-flown language here, Egill could have said more simply 'in the world' or more realistically 'in Iceland' or 'in Borgarfjörðr'. The image from myth is chosen, it seems, to keep us aware of the Odinic world of the subtext and to have Egill's own drama played out on the cosmic stage by conflating the punctual here and now with the preterpunctual pattern.

Egill needs to gather supporters like Odin, but unlike Odin he cannot collect *einherjar*; instead he finds himself in the decadent human world of *Vqluspá* 45. This world of the approaching Last Days is especially characterized by the failure of family loyalty. Egill's 'niflgóðr niðia steypir' (15,⁵⁻⁶) (evil destroyer of kinsmen) is at home in the world of *Vqluspá* 45; he is, in effect, one of the brothers who will fight with brothers and become each other's slayer. The word choice in *steypir* perhaps betrays a verbal echo of *steypiz* in *Vqluspá*, the cosmic allusion again serving to identify the decadent world of Egill's Iceland (as he sees it) with the mythic time when the world (or age of man) will be destroyed. More certainly, the adjective *niflgóðr* conjures up for us a kinsman who is darkly good, that is, evil, or else good with respect to (*Nifl-*)*Hel* and death, therefore a contrasting mirror image of the good and white god Baldr, and of his imitators Bqðvarr and Gunnarr — in some sort an anti-Baldr. The action taken by the 'evil destroyer of kinsmen' fits these decadent times in a more general way, the tone of the reference implying the disgraceful and degenerate readiness to leave a kinsman unavenged in return for lucre. For Egill such decay of family solidarity must indeed have seemed the prologue to Ragnarqk.

Sonatorrek's conclusion should also be read as a part of the Baldr-Ragnarqk pattern we have been unearthing: the periphrases for Odin in the last three stanzas constitute a progressive allusion to that god's last days. In st. 23,² he is simply 'bróður Vilis', a title alluding to Odin's early days. His next epithet 'goðiaðar' (23,³) (protector of gods) conveys a vague sense of threat, a hint of the precarious position

of the gods in the face of their enemies. Then in 23,⁵ Odin becomes ‘Míms vinr’, and we remember that the special moment of Odin’s association with Mímr is at the beginning of Ragnarök. In the penultimate kenning of the series, in st. 24,²⁻³, Odin becomes ‘úlfs of bági vígi vanr’ (the battle-accustomed enemy of the wolf); in other words the god is characterized by his relation to his enemy at Ragnarök. And finally, in 25,²⁻³, a simple *heiti* for Odin is swallowed up, as it were, within a kenning for the death goddess or for death personified: ‘Tveggja bága niörfa nipt’ (the sister of Narfi, enemy of Tveggi (Odin)). Is it carrying literary criticism too far to see this as a re-enactment at the level of diction of Odin’s actual death?⁴⁹

The concluding vision of Hel, the death goddess, and Egill awaiting her approach unafraid presents his personal analogue of Ragnarök, where the forces of death and evil foregather for their ordained encounter with the gods. This conclusion gains its ‘sense of an ending’ from its place in the trajectory of the whole poem with its movement from silence to expression of grief after the loss of a favourite son, on to the surviving father’s sense of isolation in an increasingly threatening world, to the decay of ethics and especially of family solidarity in that world, and finally to the preparation of the forces of death. This trajectory, I think, convincingly calques that of the mythic pattern which moves from the shocked silence and lamentation at Baldr’s death, to Odin’s fears and search for supporting heroes, to the last decadent days of mankind, and finally to Ragnarök. Several of the elements of this mythic complex are also present in the other early *erfikvæði*, especially the allusions to Ragnarök (or its Christian counterpart). These parallels, along with that of the *Beowulf* passages, support the Baldr-Ragnarök pattern I have tried to demonstrate in *Sonatorrek*, but from the internal evidence of the poem alone, I think, the allusions are clear enough. Olsen spoke of the agreement Egill felt in various ways between Odin’s fate and his own and of Egill’s unique empathy with Odin.⁵⁰ I agree; in all this Egill consistently plays roles of Odin. As Odin-poet he struggles to overcome silence; as Odin-father he suffered worst under the loss; as Odin-visionary he recognizes more than others that the filial losses are associated with a far-reaching decadence (‘En Óðinn bar þeim mun verst þenna skaða sem hann kunni mesta skyn hversu mikil aftaka ok missa Ásunum var í fráfalli Baldrs’).

Such allusive patterns gain in plausibility for the modern scholar and in effect for the ancient audience (I suggest) as the number of allusions increases. Both critical understanding and the affects are, at first, engaged only little by little in

⁴⁹ Magnus Olsen, ‘Commentarii Scaldici. I. 1. Sonatorrek’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 52 (1936), 209–55 (pp. 249–50), anticipates the thrust, if not quite the full extent of this argument.

⁵⁰ Olsen, ‘Commentarii’, p. 250.

literature that utilizes what T. S. Eliot called the mythical method. It seems, in fact, inevitable that in a play such as *The Cocktail Party*, the hinting ‘myths and images’ — in terms of which alone, according to Eliot, the most important things in life may come to word (*The Cocktail Party*, Act III) — will grow more concentrated, reaching a critical mass as the work moves to closure. *Sonatorrek* is not an allegory, but its original audience, so much closer to the religious bases of the poem than we, will have been quicker than modern scholars to recognize its allusive plan. Perhaps their experience of the poem (like my own at first seeing Eliot’s play) was of a building tension and a rush of recognition at the discovery of the sacramental repetition of mythic pattern in the life of man.

There are many more facets of *Sonatorrek* than I have been able to suggest in this brief, one-dimensional treatment of the poem, and I particularly regret having to leave out the important ideas around the replacement of a son by rebirth or adoption and around sacrifice and attendant notions of guilt. But some material on these aspects of Egill’s thought and on the background of the poem is treated in other published articles on *Sonatorrek* or *Sonatorrek* and *Beowulf*. In conclusion, I wish to return to the relationship of myth and ritual as a general problem to suggest that this Icelandic material helps to build up answers to the broadly theoretical question, ‘How does poetry in general express the connection between myth and ritual?’⁵¹

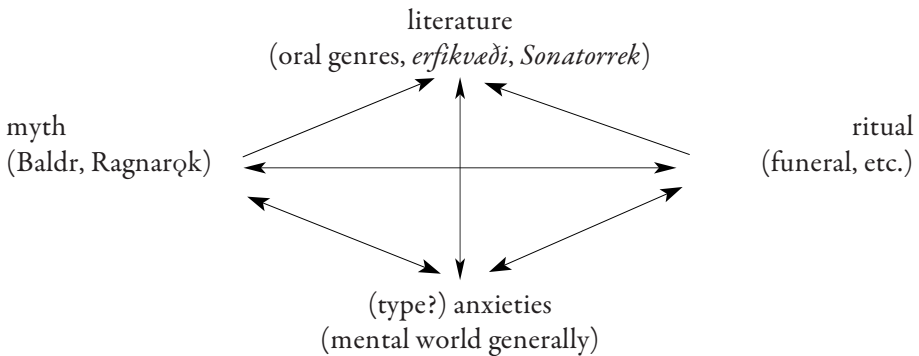
The most successful modern formulation I know of the old question of the relationship of myth and ritual is that of the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, who based himself on Navaho fieldwork and introduced some ideas from psychology. According to his refinement of the Cambridge School and its successors and critics, ‘myths and rituals tend to be very intimately associated and to influence each other [...] The explanation [of their “observed connection”] is to be found in the circumstance that [both] myth and ritual satisfy a group of identical or closely related needs of individuals’. These ‘needs of individuals’ resemble each other so much in any given cultural time and place that it is justified to speak of a ‘type anxiety’ of the group.⁵² Kluckhohn’s picture of interdependent myth and ritual is confirmed in a more recent work, Walter Burkert’s brilliant *Homo necans*; but Burkert convincingly argues the historical priority of ritual (which ethology shows in animal behaviour), and his reservations about ‘ideas’ and ‘emotions’ as shaping

⁵¹ Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 10.

⁵² Clyde Kluckhohn, ‘Myths and Rituals: A General Theory’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 35 (1942), 45–79 (p. 65, p. 72).

forces on ritual (rather than the reverse) seem a strong caveat to 'type anxiety' as well.⁵³

In addition, a literary person will notice that Kluckhohn's model omits the vehicles, the media, the realizations, chiefly literary, through which we know myths at all, and this is one of the surviving values of the Cambridge School for me: as classicists they necessarily dealt with texts and tended to locate such literary expression at the nexus of myth and ritual, a point of convergence from Kluckhohn's two 'cultural storehouse[s] of adjustive responses'.⁵⁴ The resulting hybrid model might be represented in diagram form like this:⁵⁵



In this paper we have chiefly been following the arrow from myth to literary expression in *erfikvæði*. Less is known about ritual in the pre-Christian North, but if the whole complex of actions around the *erfikvæði*, especially *Sonatorrek*, may be taken as the ritual in question, then we have been able to catch some glimpses of how the myth affected the ritual and how both myth and ritual shaped literary expression in *Sonatorrek*. For the Navaho, Kluckhohn could find independent verification of native type anxieties in his fieldwork; in a dead culture any such psychological dimensions have to be extrapolated from preserved texts, but we have touched upon some of these psychological motors that seem to lie at and just below the surface of Egill's poem. Finally, we may wonder, in a time when it is widely recognized that major elements of culture are in some sense constructed from discourse, whether the one-way arrows of the diagram should not be bi-directional, in recognition of the interdependence of all the elements.

⁵³ Burkert, *Homo necans*, pp. 27–34.

⁵⁴ Kluckhohn, 'Myths and Rituals', p. 70.

⁵⁵ This diagram has evolved somewhat from its parent in Harris, "Goðsögn" and Harris, '*Erfikvæði*'.

‘NON ENIM POSSUM PLORARE NEC LAMENTA FUNDERE’:
SONATORREK IN A TENTH-CENTURY CONTEXT
TIL MINNINGAR UM STEFÁN KARLSSON

Russell Poole

Lee M. Hollander aptly remarked that *Sonatorrek*, a poem traditionally ascribed to the tenth-century Icelandic skald Egill Skalla-Grímsson, presents ‘high and numerous barriers’ to our understanding.¹ Only two witnesses of the complete poem have survived, both very late, and the text they supply is evidently in a badly damaged and garbled state. It may also be, as Hollander suggested, that the poem was difficult even for contemporaries of its author, perhaps as a calculatedly virtuoso piece. Additionally, there is the distraction caused by nineteenth- and twentieth-century text-critical adventurism: critics routinely cite passages from the purported text that are little more than free-ranging fantasies on the part of such scholars as Finnur Jónsson, E. A. Kock, Hallvard Lie, and Magnus Olsen.² All the greater challenge, then, to salvage what we can of this work from the sea-changes wrought by the giantess Rán, whose wrecking and plundering Egill laments in his poem, and to seek to advance our understanding of its literary and cultural context.

¹ *The Skalds: A Selection of their Poems*, intro. by Lee M. Hollander (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1945), p. 88.

² *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, vols A.I–II: *Tekst efter håndskrifterne*; vols B.I–II: *Rettet tekst* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal; Kristiania: Nordisk forlag, 1912–15). E. A. Kock, *Den norsk-islandske skaldediktning*, 2 vols (Lund: Gleerups, 1946–50). Hallvard Lie, ‘*Sonatorrek* str. 1–4’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 61 (1946), 182–207. Magnus Olsen, ‘Bemærkninger til Egils større digte’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 35 (1919), 137–42; Magnus Olsen, *Edda- og skaldekvad. Forarbejder til kommentar: 4: Egils lausavisur, Høfuðlausn, Sonatorrek*, Avhandlingar utg. av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, 2 Hist.-Filos. Kl. (Oslo: I kommisjon hos H. Aschehoug, 1962).

In considering possible candidate contexts we have to keep in mind the Icelandic saga devoted to Egill while not falling into the trap of lending it undue credence. It is purely an assumption, albeit a prevalent one, that *Egils saga* was compiled by Snorri Sturluson,³ and we cannot accept his putative authorship as corroboration for the authenticity of the verses in the saga. Adding to our difficulties, it is a curious fact, as Margaret Clunies Ross observes,⁴ that although a great deal of poetry is attributed to Egill in the saga and although Snorri Sturluson recognizes him in the *Edda* as among the principal skalds, there is little evidence outside the saga for Egill's poetry. The prose narrative is likely to be a highly romanticized concoction, albeit based upon a core of eminences that have come down in oral tradition,⁵ and when verses are incorporated into it we cannot be certain that they are in their original context. This applies to *Sonatorrek* itself. The speaker's plaint of sonlessness conflicts with the saga datum that Egill has a surviving son in Þorsteinn⁶ — unless, of course, we indulge in special pleading by arguing that Egill had disowned that son. Also, many scholars have felt that the episode in which the poem is set embodies some ethnographically compelling communal memories of shamanistic practices,⁷ yet the content of *Sonatorrek*, as preserved, speaks to a rather different system of belief, as we shall see. Among other episodes of the saga, conspicuously romanticized, is the account of Egill's campaign on behalf of Aðalsteinn in England; many scholars regard the embedded *lausavísur*⁸ as of considerably later date than Egill's lifetime.⁹ The episode about the protagonist's slaying

³ See Margaret Cormack, 'Egils saga, Heimskringla, and the Daughter of Eiríkr blóðøx', *alvissmál*, 10 (2001), 61–68, and references given there.

⁴ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features', in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. by Russell Poole (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), pp. 25–49 (p. 37).

⁵ Cf. Anne Holtsmark, 'Skallagrim's Heimamenn', *Maal og Minne* (1971), 97–105.

⁶ Baldur Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen Werken des nordischen Mittelalters* (Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun Kennaraháskóla Íslands, 1995), p. 106.

⁷ Cf. Bo Ralph, 'Om tillkomsten af *Sonatorrek*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 91 (1976), 153–65 (p. 154).

⁸ *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933), hereafter referred to as ÍF 2. ÍF 2, pp. 131 and 142, sts 16 and 18.

⁹ Alistair Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture, University College London, 17 March 1970 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1971), pp. 5–7.

of the berserkr Ljótr is implausible in itself; the verses within it¹⁰ are most unlikely to have originated in the tenth century.¹¹ The episode about Egill's encounter with the Danish coastguard Eyvindr skreyja is thought to owe its inspiration to generalized king's saga motifs;¹² the *lausavísa* within it¹³ fits naturally within a series of verses credited to Eyvindr skaldaspillir.¹⁴

Thus a substantial number of the saga's verses are probably the product of re-working, augmentation, and reassignment for inclusion in *Egils saga* or attribution to this skald,¹⁵ and examples of such processes could be multiplied. Some verses summarizing major events in the hero's life are likely to have accreted around the accumulating story-materials in the twelfth century, when poems of the *ævikviða* type were becoming popular; they may have been composed by performers of the saga.¹⁶ Other verses, such as that which depicts the sea being stirred up by the storm as a chisel hews a file,¹⁷ appear to be later embellishments of a virtuoso or quasi-academic kind,¹⁸ comparable, for instance, to Markús Skeggjason's verse on a tumultuous voyage.¹⁹ Altogether, it seems likely that verses in *Egils saga* issued from a great diversity of origins and perhaps even constitute a little anthology of the verse-making that built up around his name.

It is especially important, in terms of the arguments to be expounded in this essay, for us to register that it is largely because of the saga and its embedded *lausavísur* that scholars have formed such a vivid notion of Egill as a protagonist of ancestral (or 'heathen') religion. But here, once again, the evidence is suspect. It has

¹⁰ ÍF 2, pp. 202–06, sts 37–41.

¹¹ Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 178–79.

¹² Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, p. 168.

¹³ ÍF 2, p. 127, st. 15.

¹⁴ Russell Poole, 'The Cooperative Principle in Medieval Interpretations of Skaldic Verse', *Journal of English and German Philology*, 87 (1988), 159–78.

¹⁵ Cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Art of Poetry and the Figure of the Poet in Egils Saga', *Parergon*, 22 (1978), 3–12 (pp. 8–9), repr. in *Sagas of the Icelanders*, ed. by John Tucker (New York: Garland, 1989), pp. 126–45 (pp. 144–45), and Clunies Ross, 'Skald Sagas as a Genre', p. 37.

¹⁶ Cf. Clare Downham, 'Eric Bloodaxe – Axed? The Mystery of the Last Viking King of York', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 14 (2004), 51–77 (pp. 60–61).

¹⁷ ÍF 2, p. 172, st. 32.

¹⁸ Cf. Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, p. 171.

¹⁹ Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 46–49.

been shown, for instance, that one of the series of verses about runes and incantations that forms a distinctive subset within the saga bears signs of alteration when compared with an independent and datable record elsewhere.²⁰ The episode where Egill uses runes to thwart an attempt to poison him appears to have its source in Gregory's *Dialogues* II, 3.²¹ This and other accounts of ancestral practices in the saga, with their antiquarian thrust, may mask the chameleon-like *modus operandi* of a 'historical Egill' who might quite plausibly have been 'prime-signed' in the way and for the reasons the saga at one point propounds:²²

England var kristit ok hafði lengi verit, þá er þetta var tíðenda; Aðalsteinn konungr var vel kristinn; hann var kallaðr Aðalsteinn inn trúfasti. Konungr bað Þórólf ok þá bræðr, at þeir skyldi láta þrimsignask, því at þat var þá mikill siðr, bæði með kaupmönnum ok þeim mönnum, er á mála gengu með kristnum mönnum, því at þeir menn, er þrimsignaðir váru, höfðu allt samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna, en höfðu þat at átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast. Þeir Þórólfr ok Egill gerðu þat eftir bæn konungs ok létu þrimsignask báðir.²³

[England was Christian, and had been for a long time when this was going on. King Æthelstan was fully Christian, and was known as Æthelstan the Believer. The king asked Thorolf and Egil to let themselves be provisionally baptized. It was a common custom to do both among merchants and those mercenaries who joined with Christians, since men who received provisional baptism had full contact with Christians and heathens, but kept whatever faith they were inclined to. Thorolf and Egil did this at the king's request, both accepting provisional baptism.]²⁴

Let us, then, imagine a 'historical Egill' in socio-economic terms.²⁵ He would have been representative of his class as a landholder-cum-farmer-cum-fisherman-cum-influence-broker in Iceland, with additional income streams as a litigant and claimant in Norway, as a mercenary fighting on various sides in England and Denmark, and as an itinerant poet. His poetic career might have been broadly

²⁰ James E. Knirk, 'Runes from Trondheim and a Stanza by Egill Skalla-Grímsson', in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. by Heiko Uecker, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 11 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), pp. 411–20.

²¹ Bjarni Einarsson, *Literære forudsætninger for Egils saga* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1975), p. 176.

²² Cf. David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), p. 147.

²³ ÍF 2, pp. 128–29, chap. 50.

²⁴ *Egill's Saga*, trans. by Christine Fell, with poems trans. by John Lucas (London: Dent; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 74.

²⁵ Cf. Jesse Byock and others, 'A Viking-Age Valley in Iceland: The Mosfell Archaeological Project', *Medieval Archaeology*, 49 (2005), 195–218.

similar to that of his predecessors Bragi Boddason or Þjóðólfr of Hvin. Additionally, he may well have had, as the saga states, support and resources from a friend, patron, and advocate called Arinbjörn hersir, a magnate in Norway. Arinbjörn’s own very substantial resources may have been based partly upon the flourishing trade in furs, skins, herrings, and cod — the last-named of which is curiously underplayed in the literature compared with the other commodities.

In considering which attributions can most plausibly be assigned to Egill’s corpus, we can start with the external evidence.²⁶ *Sonatorrek* joins company with two other non-*dróttkvætt*-measure poems, *Höfuðlausn* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, in standing somewhat separate from the main redactions and manuscript traditions of the saga. The manuscripts are equivocal about whether these three extended poems are integral to the saga. None of the three is preserved in all the extant manuscripts, nor are they always fully integrated into the text of the saga in the manuscripts that do preserve them. *Sonatorrek* appears only in the seventeenth-century Ketilsbók (K; AM 453 4^o) (complete) and the mid-fourteenth-century Möðruvallabók (M; AM 132 fol.) (first stanza only). *Höfuðlausn* occurs in the mid-fourteenth-century Wolfenbüttel manuscript (W; WolfAug 9 10 4^o) and in K but not in M. Singularly, W and manuscript fragment ε have prefatory formulas suggesting that only the incipit of the poem will appear, when in fact both manuscripts then go on to supply the entire poem. *Arinbjarnarkviða* is found not within its implied narrative context but out of context on the very last page of M, with two additional stanzas recorded in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*. In sum, the longer poems attributed to Egill seem to have been to some degree detachable from the prose of the saga. Their less than complete inclusion in the manuscript tradition is most simply explained on the basis that the majority of the audience knew them by heart, making their recording in written form unnecessary. They could perfectly well have lived in memorial transmission for hundreds of years.

Internal evidence tends to support the proposition that these three longer poems have a prime claim to a place in the corpus of a ‘historical Egill’. The text of *Höfuðlausn* contains linguistic features that are most readily explained by reference to Old English.²⁷ Jón Helgason expressed scepticism on this score,²⁸ but in answer

²⁶ For the following summary, cf. ÍF 2, p. xv, and Clunies Ross, ‘Skald Sagas as a Genre’, p. 37.

²⁷ Dietrich Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955), pp. 31–33.

²⁸ Jón Helgason, ‘Höfuðlausnarhjal’, in *Einarsbók: Afmæliskveðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969*, ed. by Bjarni Guðnason, Halldór Halldórsson, and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík:

Dietrich Hofmann demonstrated that Jón's key example of a linguistically late form rested upon a purely speculative etymology.²⁹ *Hqfuðlausn* appears to be authentically addressed to a king Eiríkr of York,³⁰ though this Eiríkr should not automatically be identified with Eiríkr blóðøx.³¹ It has been accepted as genuine by Sigurður Nordal, Hallvard Lie, and Odd Nordland,³² among other scholars who have used it in investigations of the Jórvið episode in the saga. *Arinbjarnarkviða* and *Sonatorrek* are both composed in the *kviðuhátt* metre, which is undoubtedly of ancient origins, being represented in the tenth century by two genealogical poems, *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, whose authenticity has not been convincingly questioned.³³ At the same time, we know that *kviðuhátt* was revived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, notably by Sturla Þórðarson, so that this evidence is equivocal. Nevertheless, linguistic evidence in these poems also strongly points to a tenth-century date of composition in contact with English lexis.³⁴ I shall discuss the lexical item *n(j)qrva* 'narrow' found in *Sonatorrek* presently; from *Arinbjarnarkviða* we have the rare item *bjóð* 'table', which is probably also to be restored in *Hqfuðlausn*.³⁵

Themes and imagery tend to recur in these three poems in a fashion that is consistent with the assumption of shared authorship. John Hines has pointed out, for instance, that both *Sonatorrek* and *Hqfuðlausn* contain the notable conceit of *mærd* 'praise' as a material object:³⁶

Pat ber ek út
ór orðhofi

Útgefendur Nokkrir Vinir, 1969), pp. 156–76; cf. Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, pp. 59, 149–64.

²⁹ Dietrich Hofmann, 'Das Reimwort *gjqr* in Egill Skallagrímssons *Hqfuðlausn*', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 6 (1973), 93–101; cf. Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket* (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, 1982), pp. 89–90.

³⁰ John Hines, 'Egill's *Hqfuðlausn* in Time and Place', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1995), 83–104 (p. 88).

³¹ Downham, 'Eric Bloodaxe – Axed?'

³² ÍF 2, p. vi. Hallvard Lie, 'Jorvikfærden: Et Vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrímssons Liv', *Edda*, 46 (1946), 144–248. Odd Nordland, *Hqfuðlausn: En traditionskritisk studie* (Oslo: Norske Samlaget, 1956), pp. 72, 228–41.

³³ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 84.

³⁴ Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, pp. 37–40.

³⁵ Russell Poole, 'Variants and Variability in the Text of Egill's *Hqfuðlausn*', in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts*, ed. by Roberta Frank (New York: AMS Press, 1993), pp. 65–105.

³⁶ Hines, 'Egill's *Hqfuðlausn*', p. 89.

mærðar timbr
máli laufgat.³⁷

[I carry that timber of praise, bearing the foliage of speech, out from the temple of words.]

Hlóðk mærðar hlut
míns knarrar skut.³⁸

[I loaded the stern of the ship of thought with a portion of praise.]

Also related in conception are the following two passages from *Arinbjarnarkviða*:

Erum auðskæf
ómunlokri
magar Þóris
mærðar efni,
vinar míns,
þvít valið liggja
tvén ok þrén
á tungu mér.³⁹

[It is easy for me to shave with the plane of the voice [the tongue] the timber of the praise of Þórir’s son, my friend, since two or three things [i.e. an abundance of themes] lie ready-chosen on my tongue.]

Vask árvakr,
bark orð saman
með málbjóns
morginverkum;
hlóðk lofkost
þann’s lengi stendr
óbrotgjarn
í bragar túni.⁴⁰

[I was awake early, I brought words together with the morning tasks of the servant of speech [the tongue]. I piled up the timber stack of praise that will stand for long, not eager to collapse, in the enclosure of poetry.]

Baldur Hafstað casts doubt on the authenticity of *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða* on a variety of grounds:⁴¹ they contain ideas found in *Hávamál* and other eddaic

³⁷ *Sonatorrek*: ÍF 2, p. 248, st. 5, 5–8.

³⁸ *Hqfuðlausn*: ÍF 2, p. 185, st. 1, 7–8.

³⁹ ÍF 2, p. 263, st. 15.

⁴⁰ ÍF 2, p. 267, st. 25.

⁴¹ Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, pp. 149–64.

poetry; they exhibit use of *nýgervingar*; Snorri's hand can be detected in their composition. But none of this is conclusive, since (respectively) the eddaic poems resist dating and may in any case have been the borrower rather than the source, *nýgervingar* occur in demonstrably early skaldic verse, and Snorri so sedulously emulated the *höfuðskáld* 'principal skalds' whose work he cites in the *Edda* that it is methodologically problematic to speak of 'seeing his hand' in verses ascribed to older poets. Guðrún Nordal registers a more diffuse unease about a number of purportedly early poems, including *Arinbjarnarkviða*, which in her opinion indicate familiarity with the idea of symmetry between microcosm and macrocosm. The relevant stanza in *Arinbjarnarkviða* is as follows:

Vasa tunglskin
tryggt at líta
né ógnlaust
Eiríks bráa,
þás ormfránn
ennimáni
skein allvalds
ægigeislum.⁴²

[The moon-shine of Eiríkr's brows [his eyes] was not safe to look at or without fearfulness, when the all-powerful one's forehead-moon [eye] shone, biting as a snake, with daunting rays.]

Here the implied symmetry is between moon (macrocosm) and eye (microcosm). For Guðrún, invocation of the theme is an indicator of twelfth-century or later composition in the shadow of neo-Platonism, as transmitted by Elucidarius and other works.⁴³ Yet there are too many early examples of kennings formed on similar bases, from poems whose attributions have traditionally been trusted (e.g. the *Þórsdrápa* ascribed to Eilífr Goðrúnarson and the *Húsdrápa* ascribed to Úlfr Uggason), for the type to be easily disposed of as a later medieval initiative — a point of which Guðrún herself is clearly aware. One might also, in principle, query the very premise that such kennings are systematically related to the idea of a microcosm/macrocosm correspondence. But, to grant the premise for the sake of discussion, the idea was already familiar in Carolingian letters. It is fully articulated in Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales* (*Natural Questions*),⁴⁴ a work known in ninth-century

⁴² ÍF 2, p. 259, st. 5.

⁴³ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 307.

⁴⁴ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Naturalium quaestionum libros*, ed. by Harry M. Hine (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1996), III, 15, 1.

Carolingian circles.⁴⁵ It was also disseminated by Isidore of Seville and Bede.⁴⁶ It could have transmitted itself onwards from Carolingian letters to vernacular poetry in ways that I shall discuss presently.

On the balance of probability, then, the three non-*dróttkvætt* poems discussed above can be regarded provisionally as authentic tenth-century compositions. That is of course not to deny that partial recomposition and refreshing might have occurred in subsequent transmission.

Of the other verses ascribed to Egill, I shall mention just a few that have special claims. Possibly significant are the fragments of an *Aðalsteinsdrápa* attested uniquely in *Egils saga*:

Nú hefr foldgnárr felda —
fellt jörð und nið Ellu —
hjaldr-snerrandi, harra
høfuðbaðmr, þrjá jøfra;
Aðalsteinn of vann annat —
alt's lægra kynfrægjum —
(hér sverjum þess, hyrjar
hrannbrjótr) konungmanni.⁴⁷

[Now the impeller of battle, the king's chief offspring, ?tenacious of? land, has felled three kings. Land falls under the kinsman of Ella. Aðalsteinn won a second time, all is subservient to this kingly person of a celebrated kindred; I swear this here, breaker of the fire of the wave [giver of gold, lord].]

Nú liggr hæst und hraustum
hreinbraut Aðalsteini.⁴⁸

[Now the highest road of the reindeer [highlands] lies under brave Aðalsteinn.]

Sigurður Nordal expressed doubts about the authenticity of this *drápa*,⁴⁹ but it was capably defended by Odd Nordland, who drew attention to the importance of the phrase 'Ellu niðr' as representing Anglo-Saxon genealogical lore whose significance would have been understood in the tenth century but scarcely by an emulator in

⁴⁵ Harry M. Hine, 'The Manuscript Tradition of Seneca's Natural Questions: Addenda', *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 42 (1992), 558–62 (pp. 560–61).

⁴⁶ Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum liber*, ed. by Gustav Becker (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1967), ix. 2; Bede, *De temporum ratione*, 35, in *Bedae Opera de temporibus*, ed. by Charles W. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1943).

⁴⁷ ÍF 2, p. 146, st. 21.

⁴⁸ ÍF 2, p. 147, st. 22.

⁴⁹ ÍF 2, pp. xv and 146.

the twelfth.⁵⁰ The poet's seeming insistence that Aðalsteinn is the principal scion of a king (or kings) and outranks all others fits well with the information that 'by the end of 927 Æþelstan had seen to it that there was no other king in England'.⁵¹ It may at the same time have had some piquancy for contemporaries if it is true that one of his brothers, Ælfweard, briefly held the kingship ahead of Æþelstan's coronation in 925.⁵² It also compares well with the treatment of the brotherly partnership between Æþelstan and Eadmund in the contemporary Old English poem editorially entitled *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which celebrates Æþelstan's 937 victory over several Welsh and Scottish kings and princes as well as over Northumbria. Associated with these two fragments in the saga are two *lausavísur* that express Egill's satisfaction at being conciliated and rewarded by Aðalsteinn.⁵³ It is possible that they represent pendants to the *drápa* proper.

Fragments of two shield poems contained within the saga⁵⁴ may also be tentatively claimed for a tenth-century corpus;⁵⁵ they are likely to represent *ekphraseis* of the shield-description type. It was the custom to compose such poems in order to acknowledge gifts from magnates. The general schema had been established one or two generations earlier by Bragi Boddason and continued in use through the tenth century before apparently falling into obsolescence.

In sum, we have reasons for associating the composition of poems that can be loosely termed lamentation, encomium, praise of friendship, and ekphrasis (or acknowledgement of gifts) with the 'historical Egill'. These associations fit with recently published research on the development of skaldic poetry, which posits Scandinavian poetic emulation of Carolingian poetics.⁵⁶ As is well known, Charlemagne

⁵⁰ Nordland, *Hqfuðlausn*, pp. 101–03; cf. Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, pp. 24–25; Hines, 'Egill's *Hqfuðlausn*', p. 100, and Anne Holtsmark's review of Nordland in *Maal og Minne* (1956), 130–42 (p. 134).

⁵¹ Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 148.

⁵² Cf. Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 146.

⁵³ ÍF 2, pp. 144–45, sts 19–20.

⁵⁴ ÍF 2, pp. 272–73, st. 54, and 275–76, st. 56.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hines, 'Egill's *Hqfuðlausn*', p. 89.

⁵⁶ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (2007), 161–85; Signe Horn Fuglesang, 'Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery in Viking Scandinavia', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (2007), 193–224 (and plates on pp. 186–92); John Hines, 'Ekphrasis as Speech-Act: *Ragnarsdrápa* 1–7', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (2007), 225–44; Russell Poole, 'Ekphrasis: Its "Prolonged Echoes" in Scandinavia', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (2007), 245–67; Russell Poole, 'Scholars and

presided over the assemblage of a glittering literary circle that from the outset impressed visitors from other jurisdictions as conferring especial prestige upon Carolingian political and cultural centres. The entourage comprised a wide array of scholars from the major European centres of culture outside Francia.⁵⁷ They undertook the production of copious new texts in an unprecedented range of forms and genres.⁵⁸ These literary pursuits continued with more or less vigour through the reigns of Charlemagne's successors, with particular further impetus from Charles the Bald around the mid-ninth century.⁵⁹ Many of the poems are, as one would expect, on public and political themes — encomia, petitions, expressions of gratitude — but others are surprisingly personal, evoking homesickness, longing for absent friends, dismay at ostracism, spiritual crises, and so forth with striking freshness and poignancy.⁶⁰ Even though the high end of this art was couched in Latin, it lent itself to vernacular imitation. Certain prosodic and rhetorical features, such as the characteristic trochaic cadences, end-rhyming, and tmetric splitting of familiar proper names, could be registered by an audience without their necessarily knowing Latin. Appreciation of other features, such as the ekphrastic descriptions, would have been cued by the artefacts themselves, since these were customarily gifts designed to be displayed at the political/cultural centre in all their visual splendour. In addition, it is reasonable to suppose that characteristic poetic genres, whether encomiastic, narrative, erotic, or lamentation, and so too certain sorts of content, notably those that drew on liturgy or well-known passages from Scripture, appealed sufficiently to find vernacular emulation.

When we think of the contacts enjoyed by the 'historical Egill', we immediately note that Æþelstan was quite tightly linked with Carolingian circles. David Dumville sums up as follows: 'His relations with the new Saxon kings of Germany created a long-lasting bond [...]. His relationships with (West) Francia led to a military intervention by Æthelstan in both Brittany (against the Scandinavians)

Skalds: The Northwards Diffusion of Carolingian Poetic Fashions', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 17 (forthcoming).

⁵⁷ *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. by Peter Godman (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Mary Garrison, 'The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature and the Court of Charlemagne', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 111–40 (pp. 112–13).

⁵⁹ *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. by Godman, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Garrison, 'Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature', pp. 115 and 119.

and in France itself.⁶¹ A series of diplomatic marriages also contributed. Æþelstan's sister Eadgifu was married to Charles III the Simple, and their son, Louis d'Outremer, the future Louis IV, was brought up, as his nickname suggests, at the court of Æþelstan. A second sister, Eadhild, was married to Count Hugh 'the Elder'. A third, Eadgyth, was married to Otto I of Germany.⁶² Complementarily, Æþelstan had links with Norway through the fosterage of the future king Hákon inn góði. Literary linkages between the imperial culture and Æþelstan's court can also be documented. Some centre upon Brittany, where Latin was vigorously cultivated,⁶³ but there was also active traffic with Flanders, Lotharingia, and north-eastern France, among other regions.⁶⁴ Of potential significance, within this dynamic, is a poem entitled the *Ludwigslied*, which dates from 881–82 and deals with the victory of King Louis III (879–82) of the west Franks over the Vikings at Saucourt in Picardy in 881.⁶⁵ The author is unidentified but was in all probability a speaker of Rhenish Franconian resident at St Amand sur l'Elnon, a locality now just south of the Franco-Belgian border.⁶⁶

Although Andreas Heusler and some other scholars have considered the *Ludwigslied* to exemplify a posited ancient vernacular genre of *Preislied*,⁶⁷ no other candidate attestations of such a tradition survive. By contrast, there is sound evidence for the existence of Latin encomia in the relevant era, for instance on the victory of Pippin over the Avars in 796 and the capture of Louis II at Benevento in 871. These poems or others like them are our most plausible candidates for status as the model for the content and scope of *Ludwigslied*.⁶⁸ Singular in *Ludwigslied*, from the formalistic point of view, is the use of end-rhyme, which seems to have its proximate source in the *Evangelienbuch*, an Old High German rhymed life of Christ incorporating a eulogy of Louis the German and completed in the later ninth century by Otfrid, a monk from Weissenburg (now Wissembourg) in Alsace,

⁶¹ Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 149.

⁶² D. A. Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 286.

⁶³ Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, pp. 306–08; Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 158.

⁶⁴ Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, p. 286; Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Brian O. Murdoch, *Old High German Literature* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), p. 93.

⁶⁶ Murdoch, *Old High German Literature*, p. 98.

⁶⁷ Andreas Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung* (Potsdam: Athenaion, 1926), pp. 119–44.

⁶⁸ J. Knight Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, rev. by K. C. King and D. R. McLintock, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 243.

who may have been the first German-speaker to use end-rhyme to any extent in the vernacular.⁶⁹ It would have been natural for the author of *Ludwigslied* to employ the verse form in which Otfrid had composed his eulogy.⁷⁰ We may register that, far from there being a firm divide between Latin and vernacular compositions, it is rather the case that ideas, forms, and manuscript formats appear to have made the transition in both directions.⁷¹ It is also to be noted that impulses could cross between what we might regard as distinct genres, from religious narrative, for instance, to encomium.⁷²

It also seems likely that differences between the various vernaculars, for instance Old High German, Old English, and Old Norse, were far from creating an impermeable barrier. The pioneering work of Eduard Sievers on transfer of poetic materials from Old Saxon to Old English can serve as a model of the processes. That being the case, it is not surprising that there is much in common between *Ludwigslied* and *The Battle of Brunanburh*, starting with similarities in situation and narration: 'a young king has ridden north to unite his divided people and through exemplary personal valour and divine guidance has led faithful followers to a spectacular victory over the hated Vikings'.⁷³ Notoriously, *Ludwigslied* offers only the vaguest account (in a mere ten lines) of Louis's battle;⁷⁴ the same can be said of *Brunanburh* on Æpelstan's battle and of *Höfuðlausn* on Eiríkr's campaign. Indeed, the authenticity of *Höfuðlausn* has been impugned by some on this basis, but evidently we are dealing with a genre characteristic; this is a poetry that designedly confines itself to generalized praise and an emphasis on ideology rather than delving into a detailed narration.

The ideology of kingship and the royal dynasty seen in *Ludwigslied*, 'Snel indi kuoni, thaz uuas imo gikunni'⁷⁵ (brave and bold, that was innate to him), is strikingly similar to that seen in *Brunanburh*: 'swa him geæpele wæs | from

⁶⁹ Murdoch, *Old High German Literature*, pp. 73 and 99.

⁷⁰ Cyril Edwards, 'German Vernacular Literature: A Survey', in *Carolingian Culture*, ed. by McKitterick, pp. 141–70.

⁷¹ Cf. Christopher Abram, 'The Errors in *The Rhyming Poem*', *Review of English Studies*, 233 (2007), 1–9.

⁷² Contrast Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, p. 27.

⁷³ Paul Fouracre, 'The Context of the OHG *Ludwigslied*', *Medium Ævum*, 54 (1985), 87–103 (p. 88).

⁷⁴ Edwards, 'German Vernacular Literature', pp. 158–59.

⁷⁵ C. Clyde Barber, *An Old High German Reader, with Notes, List of Proper Names, and Vocabulary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951), p. 79, line 51.

cneomægum, þæt hi æt campe oft | wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon, | hord and hamas⁷⁶ (as was innate in them from their forebears, that they would defend the land, treasures, and estates recurrently in battle against every opponent).⁷⁷ Egill's *Aðalsteinsdrápa* appears to chime in with this theme when it describes the king as 'kynfræg[r]' and alludes to his tenacious grip on English land, though admittedly these are commonplaces of praise-poetry. Especially remarkable is the statement in *Ludwigslied* 49: 'spilodun ther Urankon'⁷⁸ (the Franks played there).⁷⁹ Correspondingly, there is a recurring theme of play and children in *Brunanburh* that we see most strikingly exemplified in lines 51–52: 'þæs hi on wælfelda | wiþ Eadweardes afaran plegodan'⁸⁰ (that they played on the battlefield with Eadward's children). The youth of Louis and his brother is expressly noted in *Ludwigslied* — it is on account of their youth that God decides to test them.

Ludwigslied is reminiscent of the Old Testament in the depiction of Louis as a warrior king. God speaks to him as He spoke to the prophets of old. He chooses Louis as His champion against the heathen; correspondingly Louis rallies his people to God's cause.⁸¹ Although *Brunanburh* is far less overtly religious in content than *Ludwigslied*, its ideology is implied in the notation of the time of battle: 'siðþan sunne up | on morgentid, mære tungol, | glad ofer grundas, Godes condel beorht, | eces Drihtnes, oð sio æþele gesceaft | sah to setle'⁸² (from the time the sun glided upwards in the morning, great star, God the eternal lord's bright candle, until that noble creation sank to rest). Also, the mention in *Brunanburh* of 'five kings'⁸³ who fall victim to the victorious king looks like a reminiscence of the Book of Joshua chapter 10, where Joshua rescues the children of Israel from a concerted expedition by the five kings of the Amorrites. This allusion may even have given rise to a little tradition in its own right. In *Eiríksmál*, a lament in memory of Eiríkr

⁷⁶ *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. by Alistair Campbell (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 93, lines 7–10.

⁷⁷ N.B. also the parallel in *Beowulf*, 2696; *Beowulf: An Edition*, ed. by Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 142.

⁷⁸ Barber, *Old High German Reader*, p. 79.

⁷⁹ Translating *spilōn* as 'make fun, play'; cf. Joseph Wright, *An Old High German Primer, with Grammar, Notes, and Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 170.

⁸⁰ *Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. by Campbell, p. 94.

⁸¹ Bostock, *Handbook on Old High German Literature*, p. 241.

⁸² *Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. by Campbell, p. 93, lines 13–17.

⁸³ *Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. by Campbell, p. 93, lines 28–29.

of York, we hear of Eiríkr's welcome into Valhöll, following his death in a battle with five kings, and it may be that the precise number five here represents an embellishment.⁸⁴ The Northumbrian origins of *Eiríksmál* are indicated by linguistic evidence.⁸⁵ Further aspects of Christian ideology are strongly represented in the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that follow upon *Brunanburh*, consistent with the monastic maintenance of the *Chronicle*.⁸⁶

By contrast, Egill in *Höfuðlausn* associates his victorious Eiríkr not with these Christian ideologemes but with an Odinic cult. Where the Christian God looks approvingly upon the works of Louis II and (by implication of the symbolism) upon those of Æþelstan, it is Óðinn who gazes approvingly on those of Eiríkr: 'En Viðrir sá, | hvar valr of lá'⁸⁷ (And Viðrir [Óðinn] saw where the dead bodies lay). Hines finds such an assertion of ancestral Scandinavian beliefs and values in the Scandinavian-settled areas of England surprising. 'Both politically and culturally, assimilation between invader and native had been going on for several generations; in the middle of the tenth century this was a strong and continuing process, against which the uncompromisingly Viking character of Egill's poem stands in sharp contrast.'⁸⁸ It is as if Egill is resisting or reacting against the hegemonic ideology. Given these strong and diverse connections from Carolingian praise poetry to the praise of Aðalsteinn and onwards to the praise of Eiríkr, it is reasonable to explain the end-rhyming in *Höfuðlausn* as prompted either directly or mediately by *Ludwigslied*. Naturally, this is not to exclude the reinforcing influence of other rhyming verse, whether in Latin or in English, that Egill might have been aware of from Northumbrian or even Hibernian-Scandinavian sources.⁸⁹

We have seen that in the case of *Ludwigslied*, speculations concerning a tradition of vernacular Germanic *Preislieder* are difficult to make good, and it is currently thought more plausible by scholars that Latin works furnished the proximate

⁸⁴ Axel Seeberg, 'Five Kings', *Saga-Book*, 20 (1979–80), 106–13; cf. Downham, 'Eric Bloodaxe – Axed?', p. 63.

⁸⁵ Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, pp. 42–52.

⁸⁶ Jayne Carroll, 'Engla Waldend, Rex Admirabilis: Poetic Representations of King Edgar', *Review of English Studies*, 234 (2007), 113–32.

⁸⁷ *Höfuðlausn*: ÍF 2, 185, st. 3, lines 7–8.

⁸⁸ Hines, 'Egill's *Höfuðlausn*', p. 99.

⁸⁹ Cf. Gustav Neckel, *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung: Mit Exkursen zur Heldensage* (Dortmund: Ruhfus, 1908), p. 373; Stefán Einarsson, *The Origin of Egill Skallagrímsson's Rúnbenda: Scandinavica et Finno-Ugrica*, Studier tillägnade Björn Collinder den 22 Juli 1954 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1954), pp. 54–60; Abram, 'Errors in *The Rhyming Poem*', p. 6.

model for the German poem. This poem in turn prompted English poems in a process that leads ultimately to Egill's *Höfuðlausn* and the anonymous *Eiríksmál*. It is my contention that a broadly parallel process operated with *Sonatorrek*: while it is very reasonable, for reasons I shall document presently, to envisage influence from its vernacular English counterparts,⁹⁰ the formative possibilities of Carolingian poetics should not be overlooked. A thorough survey of the Carolingian Latin literary monuments for possible candidate models would be impracticable in the present essay. Instead, I shall single out Gottschalk (Godescalc) of Orbais (c. 803–c. 868) as an indicative example of the kind of author whose Latin compositions, expressive as they were of a 'deep-seated tension' that Richard E. Sullivan finds pervasively in Carolingian religious consciousness,⁹¹ might have provided an impulse towards lamentations and kindred personal poetry in the vernaculars. Aside from the distinctiveness and vigour of his literary works, Gottschalk was a notorious, not to say infamous, personality in the ninth century. Having gained his education at Fulda and Reichenau, initially as an enforced oblate, he showed a rebellious streak by deviating from approved Augustinian doctrine, developing a modified doctrine which held that some individuals are predestined to salvation and others to damnation, also that each individual's will is predetermined either to good or to evil. Accusations of heresy were the inevitable consequence; Gottschalk was condemned and underwent a lengthy imprisonment. Seventeen of his poems survive, among them elegies on suffering and exile; they give a vividly autobiographical impression even if they are not necessarily faithful representations of his personal history.⁹² Although Sullivan does not mention Gottschalk specifically, his stirring words are generally applicable: 'if modern scholars do not keep the spiritual yearnings embedded in such sources central to their treatment of Carolingian cultural life, they are apt to overlook some of the prime forces motivating thought and expression and to miss some of the most significant originality of the Carolingian cultural achievement'.⁹³

In elaborating on this possible pattern of literary influence and evolution, I shall concentrate on a small selection of stanzas from *Sonatorrek*. I begin by quoting the opening stanzas. I take my text principally from the edition of Gabriel Turville-

⁹⁰ Neckel, *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung*, p. 376.

⁹¹ Richard E. Sullivan, 'The Context of Cultural Activity in the Carolingian Age', in *The gentle voices of teachers: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, ed. by Richard E. Sullivan (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995), pp. 51–105 (p. 77).

⁹² *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. by Godman, p. 39.

⁹³ Sullivan, 'Context of Cultural Activity', p. 77.

Petre and have consulted his translations,⁹⁴ but have also referred to the editions of Sigurður Nordal and Bjarni Einarsson;⁹⁵ a number of modifications are my own.

Mjök erum tregt
tungu at hræra
eðr loptvætt
ljóðpundara;
esa nú vænligt
of Viðurs þýfi,
né hógdrægt
ór hugar fylgsni;⁹⁶

[It is very irksome for me to move my tongue or the air-weighted balance-arm of song; it is not propitious now for poetry [Viðurr's = Óðinn's theft] nor readily drawn out from the recess of thought;]

esa auðþeystr,
þvít ekki veldr
høfugligr,
ór hyggu stað
fagnafundr
Friggjar niðja
ár borinn
ór Jötunheimum,⁹⁷

[not easily impelled from the place of thinking — heavy sorrow causes this — is the welcome meeting of the kinsmen of Frigg [i.e. the feast of the Æsir gods = poetry], borne long ago from the lands of giants,]

lastalauss,
es lífnaði
á Nökkvers
nökkva Bragi;
jötuns hals
undir fljóta
Náins niðr
fyr naustdurum,⁹⁸

⁹⁴ E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 28–41.

⁹⁵ ÍF 2; and *Egils Saga*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003).

⁹⁶ ÍF 2, p. 246, st. 1.

⁹⁷ ÍF 2, pp. 246–47, st. 2.

⁹⁸ ÍF 2, p. 247, st. 3.

[when Bragi [the poetic art?], free of vice, survived on Nǫkkverr's [?a dwarf's?] boat; the giant's neck-wounds flow down in front of Náinn's [the dwarf's] boatshed doors,]

þvítt ætt mín
 á enda stendr,
 sem †hræbarnar
 hlinnar† marka;
 esa karskr maðr,
 sás kǫgla berr
 frænda hrørs,
 af fletjum ríðr,⁹⁹

[because my kindred stands at its endpoint, as †*hræbarnar hlinnar†* mark [it, i.e. the endpoint]; the man is not cheerful about a kinsman's death who carries the joints [of the body], rides from the dwellings,]

þó munk mitt
 ok móður hrør
 fǫður fall
 fyrst of telja;
 þat berk út
 ór orðhofi
 mærdar timbr
 máli laufgat.¹⁰⁰

[yet I will first recount the fall of my father and the death of my mother; I carry that timber of praise, bearing the foliage of speech, out from the temple of words.]

Hollander can again be our guide when he speaks of Egill needing to 'overcome his leaden lethargy of speechless sorrow'¹⁰¹ in sts 1–2. The general idea of a silence enforced through extreme grief has a place in the mythology of Baldr,¹⁰² but the aspect of Egill's opening stanzas that is most compelling is the rhetoric, and the story of Baldr as told in *Snorra Edda* has no counterpart to that. Scholars have traditionally compared these two opening stanzas with eddaic poetry. *Guðrúnarkviða I* in particular contains the generalized idea of a sorrow that is so deep that emotion has become repressed and cannot be vented or released. The poem opens with this key motif so that the audience must perforce wait until the eventual

⁹⁹ ÍF 2, p. 247, st. 4.

¹⁰⁰ ÍF 2, p. 248, st. 5.

¹⁰¹ *The Skalds*, intro. by Hollander, p. 89.

¹⁰² Joseph Harris, "Goðsögn sem hjálp til að lifa af" í Sonatorreki, in *Heiðin minni: Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. by Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1999) pp. 47–70 (pp. 54–55).

resolution comes about. Yet the detailed working of the motif is different from that of *Sonatorrek*, which lacks the key distinctive notion of the protagonist's being about to 'springa' (burst) (st. 2) through grief.¹⁰³ If we look instead to Carolingian poetics, we have a much closer analogue in one of Gottschalk's poems:

6. Volo unde nunc lugere, sed non possum, domine;
sine te quivi peccare, sed nequeo plangere,
sine te sum lapsus male, sed non possum surgere.
7. Non enim possum plorare nec lamenta fundere,
potui multa patrare qui mala cotidie,
quorum soli patet tuae numerus scientiae.
8. Caro ita quidem mea sine te est arida,
sicut terra sine aqua, sicut petra rigida,
oculorum est pupilla. ceu cristallum frigida,
9. Sicque sicut silex dura cuncta sunt precordia;
ideo non valet ulla emanare guttula,
exque me nec saltern una ire potest lacrima.
10. Proinde meorum multa criminum cum milia
sint et plura quam arena marina per litora
atque multo graviora massa extent plumbea,
11. Clamat, ecce, supplex mea nunc ad te miseria
petens, ut digneris tua me misericordia
hac respicere in hora torpentem socordia.
12. Age iam mei mollita de cordis duricia
educ, queso, modo multa lacrimarum flumina
ad facinora deflenda simul et flagitia.

- [6. And so I now want to mourn, but I cannot, Lord;
without You I could sin, but I cannot lament;
without You I have fallen badly but I cannot rise.
7. I cannot cry or pour forth lamentation,
I who every day could commit many evil deeds
whose number is plain only to Your wisdom.
8. Without You my flesh is dry,
like the land without water, like the hard rock,
the pupils of my eyes are as cold as ice.
9. All my inner being is like the hard flint,
and so the tiniest drop cannot flow forth
nor can even a single tear be shed by me.
10. Therefore, since my crimes in their many thousands
are more numerous than the sand on the seacoast
and much weightier than a mass of earth,

¹⁰³ Cf. Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), pp. 268–69.

11. my misery now calls out to You in supplication,
 entreating You to deign mercifully to turn Your gaze
 upon me in my dull foolishness at this hour.
 12. Come now, transform the hardness of my heart into softness,
 bring forth, I entreat, many streams of tears
 to lament my sins and wrong-doings.]¹⁰⁴

Like Egill, the speaker expresses the predicament of being unable to mourn, weep, or lament. Gottschalk's case differs from Egill's insofar as the inhibition arises from a deep, disabling remorse and guilt at sin. Egill's case differs from Gottschalk's insofar as he expresses himself in terms familiar to the Viking livelihood: the *pundari* is a scale with one arm on which to slide a weight and could be used for either legal or trading purposes;¹⁰⁵ the word itself epitomizes processes of cultural and political contact, since clearly it derives ultimately from Latin via one or another West Germanic language.¹⁰⁶ But the inhibition per se is shared, and there is also the formal resemblance that the motif is repeated with amplification by both poets. The first stanza of *Sonatorrek* contains a fourfold enunciation.¹⁰⁷ The second stanza further amplifies the first¹⁰⁸ and, on my reading, continues on directly into st. 3 so as to elaborate on Egill's comparison between his compositional agonies and the tortuous appropriation of the poetic mead by Óðinn.¹⁰⁹ The first *helmingr* of st. 3 appears to have a Bragi as its subject.¹¹⁰ Personages of this name are normally identified as either the proto-poet or the god of poetry (or perhaps the two roles synthesized into one). Here, however, the word Bragi appears to represent a hypostasis of the poetic art per se, surviving the turmoil attendant upon the origins of that art on the ship of the dwarves. The second *helmingr* moves, on my interpretation, into the present tense to describe the death agonies of one of the giants killed by the dwarves during that same epoch. The details in the *helmingr* suggest

¹⁰⁴ 'O mi custos', cited from *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. by Godman, pp. 234–37.

¹⁰⁵ Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 3 vols, 2nd edn (Oslo: [n.pub.], 1883–96), repr. with vol. IV: *Tillegg og rettelser*, ed. by Didrik Arup Seip and Trygve Knudsen (Oslo: Trygve Juul Møller, 1954), s.v. 'pundari'.

¹⁰⁶ Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd edn (Leiden: Brill, 1977), s.v. 'pundari'.

¹⁰⁷ ÍF 2, p. 246, n. ad loc.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hallberg, *Den fornisländska poesien* (Stockholm: Svenska bokförlaget, 1962), p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ ÍF 2, p. 247, n. ad loc.

¹¹⁰ *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis*, ed. by Sveinbjörn Egilsson, Hafniae (Copenhagen: Societas Regia Antiquariorum Septentrionalium, 1860), s.v. 'helmingr'.

an identification with the giantess killed by Galarr when he drops a millstone upon her head as she stands in a doorway.¹¹¹ The description recalls the poet Bragi Boddason not merely by virtue of the use of his name in the preceding *helmingr* but also through commonalities with that poet's ekphrastic description of the death agonies of Jǫrmunrekkr in *Ragnarsdrápa*, where we see a similar use of some present-tense narration and a focus upon the flow of blood. The passage could be construed as Egill's small tribute to his distinguished predecessor within a general association of ideas centring on poetics and agonies.

The extended metaphor in *Sonatorrek* st. 5, of taking timbers from a temple, relates in a general way to the technological theme noted above as common to all three non-*dróttkvætt* compositions associated with Egill. Torfi Tulinius, however, taking his cue from Halldór Laxness, has proposed a specific reference to Scripture (Numbers 17. 1–9).¹¹² He notes the following parallels: both texts show wood (rods / 'timbr') taken out of the temple (tabernacle / 'hof'); the wood has budded despite having been cut (leaves and blossom / 'laufgat') through the action of language (the Word of God / 'mál'). Tulinius draws the inference that 'the Egill Skalla-Grimsson who lived in the pagan tenth century' could not have composed the poem. But this is problematic on a number of fronts. For one thing, the comparison seems forced. For another, Vikings, as we have seen, were not 'pagan' in any absolute sense, since they moved freely within Christian as well as non-Christian milieux, especially once prime-signed. Also, the story of Aaron's rod does not seem to have been a familiar piece of Scripture in this era. It tended to be eclipsed, in liturgy as also in patristic and later commentary, by the flowering rod of Isaiah's prophecy.¹¹³

The final stanzas of *Sonatorrek* offer further possible indications of contact with Christian poetry:

Blætka því
bróður Vílis,

¹¹¹ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 3; cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes, Everyman (London: Dent, 1987), p. 62.

¹¹² Torfi Tulinius, 'The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as an Influence in Saga Composition and Interpretation', in *Skaldsagas*, ed. by Poole, pp. 191–217 (pp. 195–96). Halldór Laxness, 'Nokkrir hnýsilegir staðir í fornkvæðum', *Tímarit Mals og Menningar*, 32 (1970), 1–24; repr. in *Yfirsýggðir staðir* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1971), pp. 12–48.

¹¹³ Susan Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy & History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa, 1000–1125* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 53.

goðjaðar,
 at gjarn séak;
 þó hefr Míms vinr
 mér of fengnar
 bǫlva bœtr,
 ef et betra telk.¹¹⁴

[I do not sacrifice to the brother of Vílir [Óðinn], protector of the gods, because I am eager [so to do]; yet the friend of Mímr [Óðinn] has bestowed on me recompenses for my injuries, if I reckon up the better [side].]

Reference to Old English poetry suggests that ‘betra’ and ‘bót’ in this stanza are loaded words. Examples are, respectively, ‘þa bote’ (the remedy) in *Wanderer* 113¹¹⁵ and ‘hogaþ to þære betran wynne’ (thinks to the better joy) in *The Riming Poem* 81,¹¹⁶ in contexts where the assertion is that the ‘remedy’ supplied by the Christian God has efficacy and the Christian afterlife in heaven is ‘better’. Egill appears to co-opt these key words into ancestral belief, in resistance to their use by Christianity. A similar co-option appears to occur in the following stanza:

Gofumk þrótt
 ulfs of bági
 vígi vanr
 vammi firrða
 ok þat geð,
 es gerðak mér
 vísa fjandr
 at vélqndum.¹¹⁷

[The adversary of the wolf [Óðinn, as combatant against the Fenrisúlfr], experienced in combat, gave me an accomplishment clear from fault and this [cast of] mind that I formed definite enemies for myself out of [literally, ‘at’] dissemblers.]

The poem itself in its original virtuosic form was no doubt intended as testimony enough to its author’s possession of an accomplishment that is ‘clear from fault’. The use of the adjective ‘lastalauss’ in st. 3 is parallel, if we accept that it qualifies the proper name ‘Bragi’ standing generically for ‘poetry’. A third instance occurs

¹¹⁴ ÍF 2, p. 255, st. 23.

¹¹⁵ *The Wanderer*, rev. edn by Roy F. Leslie, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies, (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1985), p. 64.

¹¹⁶ *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), p. 89.

¹¹⁷ ÍF 2, p. 256, st. 24.

in st. 20, this one the exception in that it describes not poetry but one of the speaker's sons:

Síz son minn
sóttar brími
heiptugligr
ór heimi nam,
þanns ek veit
at varnaði
vamma varr
við vámaeli.¹¹⁸

[From the time a malevolent fire of sickness [fever] took from the world my son, whom I know to be on his guard, chary of faults, against injurious speech.]

Evidently the freedom from vices and flaws is being emphasized in *Sonatorrek*.¹¹⁹ The notion of being 'free from fault', 'removed from fault', 'protected from fault' is hard to parallel in skaldic poetry but prevalent in Old English poetry. An instance occurs in *The Riming Poem*:

Uton nu, halgum gelice,
scyldum biscyrede, scyndan generede,
wommum biwerede, wuldre generede,
þær moncyn mot for meotude rot,
soðne god geseon, ond aa in sibbe gefean.¹²⁰

[Let us now, like the saints, severed from sins, hasten saved, protected against vices, saved in glory, there where mankind, exultant in the presence of the Lord, may see the true God and rejoice in peace forever.]

Here, as in *Sonatorrek*, the idea of faultlessness is associated contextually with the imminence of death. Indeed, *The Riming Poem* may have a double linkage with Egill's oeuvre: not merely thematically, as suggested above, but also prosodically, because of its end-rhymed form, which is all but unique in Old English.¹²¹

The final stanza of *Sonatorrek* is highly complex in its associations:

Nú erum torvelt,
Tveggja bága

¹¹⁸ ÍF 2, p. 254, st. 20.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Harris, 'Sacrifice and Guilt in *Sonatorrek*', in *Studien zum Altgermanischen*, ed. by Uecker, pp. 173–96 (p. 189).

¹²⁰ *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 89, lines 83b–87.

¹²¹ Cf. *Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 43.

njórrva nipt
 á nesi stendr;
 skalk þó glaðr
 með góðan vilja
 ok óhryggr
 Heljar bíða.¹²²

[Now things have turned against me, the ?constricting? sister of Tveggi's foe [Hel, as sister of the Fenrisúlfr] stands on the headland; I must however await Hel gladly with goodwill and untroubled.]

Some scholars construe this stanza as Egill voicing a death-wish and ending his poem on a 'suicidal note'.¹²³ Sävborg places *Sonatorrek* side by side with *Guðrún-arhvqt*, as both culminating in the speaker's proud and resolute preparation for death.¹²⁴ But this is to force a parallelism on the two poems that on closer inspection does not exist. There is no suggestion that the speaker in *Sonatorrek* proposes to engineer his own death, in the way Guðrún is doing: that rests purely upon an inference from the saga.¹²⁵ Other scholars prefer to compare *Hávamál* 15, 'glaðr ok reifr | scyli gumna hvern | unz sinn bíðr bana'¹²⁶ (each of men must be happy and cheerful until he undergoes his death). But this likewise, although broadly similar in ideas and vocabulary, is not precisely equivalent, since it is concerned with living happily, not with waiting for death. Nor, despite Sävborg,¹²⁷ is there a clear parallel in the Sigvatr *lausavísa* describing a grieving husband's eagerness to die.¹²⁸ In sum, the sentiment in *Sonatorrek* is hard to parallel in extant early medieval Scandinavian verse.

¹²² ÍF 2, p. 256, st. 25.

¹²³ Carol J. Clover, 'Cold are the Counsels of Women: The Tradition Behind the Tradition', The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28 July–2 August 1985, workshop papers, pp. 151–77 (p. 158).

¹²⁴ Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjálteðiktning*, p. 283; Daniel Sävborg, 'Beowulf and Sonatorrek Are Genuine Enough: An Answer to Klaus von See', *Skandinavistik*, 30 (2000), 44–59 (p. 49).

¹²⁵ Cf. Klaus von See, 'Das Phantom einer altgermanischen Elegiendichtung: Kritische Bemerkungen zu Daniel Sävborg, "Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjálteðiktning"', *Skandinavistik*, 28 (1998), 87–100 (p. 93).

¹²⁶ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, 5th edn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1983–), I, 19; Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis*, p. 107; ÍF 2, p. 256, n. ad loc.

¹²⁷ Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjálteðiktning*, p. 283.

¹²⁸ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, B.I, 251.

Once again, the situation is different if we look to early medieval Christian poetry. *The Wanderer* is among the Old English poems that present a speaker waiting for or hoping to experience mercy or grace upon death: 'Oft him anhaga are gebideð'¹²⁹ (Often the solitary man experiences grace). Egill's 'heljar bíða' appears to be formulated oppositionally to such an expression of Christian faith. The apparent reference to Hel as 'constricting' or 'narrow'¹³⁰ is significant not merely because it shows contact with the OE *nearo* 'narrow' (which, aside from the possible example of *Nqrvasund* = 'narrow sound'?, i.e. 'Straits of Gibraltar', is otherwise not attested in Scandinavian texts), but especially because it has a close counterpart in some uses of the OE adjective *enge*. According to the *Dictionary of Old English*, *enge* has sense 1 'narrow, close, constrained, confined', with a derived special sub-sense 'describing the narrow confines of Hell': thus 'þes enga stede', 'se enga ham', 'þæt engeste eþelrice', as in *Solomon and Saturn* 105–06: 'huru him bið æt heartan wa, ðonne <he> hangiende helle wisceð, ðæs engestan eðelrices'¹³¹ (truly there is woe at his heart, when hanging he wishes for Hell, the narrowest native kingdom). Also relevant may be sense 3 'oppressive, painful, grievous, cruel', as in *Phoenix* 52: 'se enga deað'¹³² (oppressive death). Likewise we can reckon with sub-sense 3.a in a personification of Death, found uniquely in *Guthlac B* 997: 'enge anhoga'¹³³ (oppressive solitary one).

Also suggestive from this Christian perspective is the phrase 'með góðan vilja'. Halldór Laxness saw it as an allusion to Luke 2. 14,¹³⁴ and this is surely right. Two versions of the passage coexist in the Latin tradition, one in the Bible and one in the liturgy.¹³⁵ In the Vulgate we have 'Gloria in altissimis Deo et super terra(m) pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis', while the text of the liturgy reads as follows: 'Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis'. Both versions translate approximately as 'Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to

¹²⁹ *The Wanderer*, rev. edn by Leslie, p. 61, line 1.

¹³⁰ Cf. ÍF 2, p. 256, n. ad loc.

¹³¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 35.

¹³² *Phoenix*, ed. by Norman F. Blake (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1964), p. 46.

¹³³ Jane Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 113.

¹³⁴ Laxness, 'Nokkrir hnýsilegir staðir í fornvæðum', pp. 40–47; cf. Tulinius, 'Prosimetrum Form 2', p. 196.

¹³⁵ Birger Olsson, 'The Canticle of the Heavenly Host (Luke 2. 14) in History and Culture', *New Testament Studies*, 50 (2004), 147–66.

men of good will'. Augustine interprets this text as identifying *bona voluntas* 'good will' as the basis on which individuals merit happiness.¹³⁶ Gottschalk for his part tackles the question of how individuals acquire *bona voluntas* in his *De praedestinatione* and finds the answer in Ezekiel 11. 19: 'Et dabo eis cor unum, et spiritum novum tribuam in visceribus eorum: et auferam cor lapideum de carne eorum, et dabo eis cor carneum' ('And I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit in their bowels: and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh').¹³⁷ This is to say that it is only God who can engender the creation of good will. In Gottschalk's thinking, therefore, the acquisition of the goodwill necessary for redemption depends upon a divine release from the inhibition of expression that we discussed earlier. That is the trajectory of his 'O mi custos' discussed above. It is all the more striking that these motifs are both represented in Egill's poem.

Nobody would deny that *Sonatorrek* has its basis in ancient Scandinavian traditions. That applies particularly to the speaker's 'friendship' with the god Óðinn. It is also beyond doubt that the poem proved structurally formative for later medieval Scandinavian poetry, as a *tregróf* 'chain of sorrows', to use the vernacular term found in *Guðrúnarhvot*.¹³⁸ But there are other elements, complexly blended with the above, that evoke a European Christian ethos and call into question the proposition that *Sonatorrek* is 'heathen' through and through.¹³⁹ What we seem to see is a cultural grafting of, on the one side, ancestral narratives and ideologemes with, on the other side, Christian scripture and doctrine, the latter as cultivated in ninth- and tenth-century Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon centres. *Sonatorrek* co-opts Christian doctrine on preparation for death and the afterlife so as to reinscribe it oppositionally within an ancestral system of beliefs. In this respect it has its parallel in *Hofuðlausn*, which asserts that great kings are guided by Óðinn and bypasses the received doctrine in this type of encomium that rulers obtain guidance from the Christian God.

Indeed, if we trust in the title of *Hofuðlausn* and the account of events given in *Arinbjarnarkviða* as our paratext, we can point to a second broad pattern in

¹³⁶ Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 111.

¹³⁷ *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. by Godman, p. 236.

¹³⁸ Cf. Neckel, *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung*, p. 374; Clover, 'Cold are the Counsels of Women', p. 159; Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjälteediktning*, p. 282.

¹³⁹ Cf. Sigurður Nordal, 'Átrúnaðr Egils Skallagrímssonar', *Skírnir*, 98 (1924), 145–65; *The Skalds*, intro. by Hollander, p. 89; Ralph, 'Om tillkomsten af *Sonatorrek*', p. 163.

common between *Höfuðlausn* and *Sonatorrek*, whereby the menaces of jealous tyrants (Eiríkr, Rán, Óðinn) are confronted and checked by the redeeming gift of poetry. At the same time, *Sonatorrek* is the more complex of the two poems in that it embodies a protest against Óðinn's capricious friendship while also speaking of a continuing subservience to him. A generation later, Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld seems to have had *Sonatorrek* in mind when he marked his conversion with a poetic composition that likewise brings the two systems of belief into collision and shows a conflict of allegiances.¹⁴⁰

As a lament, *Sonatorrek* has affinities with the well-known series of Old English poems, exemplified by *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* but also including *The Riming Poem* and other works, that in a purportedly autobiographical fashion combine elements of what could be called 'grief', 'resentment', 'consolation', and 'wisdom' in a mercurially shifting sequence. Likewise, it contains hints of the Carolingian cultivation of spirituality within intensely personal poetry. Adapting an idea of Daniel Sävborg's,¹⁴¹ I suggest that the earliest Germanic poetry of lamentation that we can reach back to is of this sort and had its basis in Christianized communities and poets.

¹⁴⁰ Russell Poole, 'The "Conversion Verses" of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld', *Maal og Minne* (2002), 15–37.

¹⁴¹ Sävborg, 'Beowulf and Sonatorrek Are Genuine Enough', p. 53; cf. von See, 'Das Phantom einer altgermanischen Elegiendichtung', p. 91 and references given there.

LULLABY AS LAMENT: LEARNING TO MOURN IN MIDDLE ENGLISH NATIVITY LYRICS

Amy N. Vines

Barbara Hanawalt briefly discusses medieval lullabies in *The Ties that Bound*: ‘Traditionally, we think lullabies are supposed to reassure the baby, singing of good things that will happen and protective people and surroundings; but not so the medieval versions.’¹ Hanawalt suggests that these early lullabies often expressed the mother’s or nurse’s ambivalence towards childrearing and served to integrate children immediately into the grim realities of physical hardship and infant mortality. Indeed, medieval lullabies, the vast majority of which depict Mary singing to the infant Jesus, usually include ominous prophecies of the Crucifixion. In the standard lullaby form, according to Hanawalt, the mother soothes the child, informs it about the world and its heritage, and even her hopes for the future. However, the earliest surviving lullabies, which occur in lyrics written about the birth of Jesus, reverse this trajectory, and place the Christ child in the position of knowledge, informing his mother about his future Crucifixion. Thus, the grim realities Hanawalt associates with early lullabies are revealed more for the mother’s benefit than the child’s. The relationship between Mary and Jesus depicted in these Nativity lyrics is fraught with the pathos of Christ’s future torture and the intimacy of maternal love. These lullaby lyrics also carried a powerful didactic message that encouraged imitation in its readers.² The lyrics were intended not to comfort the child, but to instruct the reader, to enable the meditator’s

¹ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 179.

² Hanawalt, *Ties that Bound*, p. 179.

connection with Christ's suffering and Mary's sacrifice through the depiction of an intimate parental bond.

Concentrating on the scene of Christ's birth, which appealed to the affective predilections of so many late medieval writers, this article will further explore the ways in which late medieval Nativity lyrics encourage the reader's emotional identification with Mary's lament about the future Crucifixion through the use of the lullaby form. Unlike other affective devotional texts, which celebrate the joy inherent in Christ's birth, these lullaby lyrics, I suggest, transform the emotional intimacy of the first interactions between mother and child into a lesson in parental mourning. Mary's shift from lullaby to lament in many of the Nativity lyrics models the emotional shift that is intended to take place within the reader. Picturing a familiar, loving scene with their own children enables the readers to identify more readily with Mary's loss and to understand her sacrifice more fully. The emotional didacticism of Mary's lullaby laments is conveyed most poignantly through the dialogue structure that dominates these lyrics. Mary's soothing song, which is ostensibly intended to stop the child's crying or talking, is transformed into a verbal exchange where the Christ child provides a kind of second Annunciation, giving his mother the information that Gabriel omitted: he will be martyred.

The traumatic experience produced by Christ's information provides the catalyst for Mary's Nativity lament. Constructing laments can be a means to both acknowledge and overcome grief. Recent studies in trauma theory note the therapeutic value of creating narrative accounts of trauma. Cathy Caruth, for instance, discusses the inability of most victims of traumatic experience to understand and assimilate fully the event or events at the moment of occurrence. As a result, there is a belated traumatic remembrance (in the form of dreams or flashbacks, for example) marked by a 'repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it'.³ These 'insistent reenactments of the past', she suggests, 'do not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely register the force of an experience that is not fully owned'.⁴ Discussing the potential for victims to overcome their traumatic experiences, Susan J. Brison praises the 'process of "mastering the trauma" through [the] repeated telling of one's story'.⁵ Ultimately, Brison asserts, '*saying* something about

³ *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁴ *Trauma*, ed. by Caruth, p. 151.

⁵ Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 54.

a traumatic memory *does* something to it'.⁶ While it is surely the case that conveying Mary's grief through the medium of the Nativity lyric 'does something to it', I would argue that the lullaby laments are designed to *perpetuate* rather than overcome the trauma Mary experiences when she first learns of Christ's future Crucifixion. This painful awareness of her son's destiny is the trauma that should never be healed or forgotten; the Nativity laments are meant to be heard and shared as a repetitive endorsement of Mary's and Christ's sacrifice on humanity's behalf. Although Mary's traumatic narrative propagates rather than triumphs over the cause of her lament, recent critical work on trauma theory and narrative production — particularly the role of the audience in the composition of trauma texts — provides useful ways of understanding the affective and didactic goals of the emotionally fraught lullaby lyrics.

Before I begin to discuss the lyrics and their representation of Mary's emotional and spiritual trauma in detail, it will be helpful to provide a brief account of the subgenre of Nativity lyrics and their relationship to other late medieval Marian laments and affective devotional texts. The majority of medieval lyrics written on the subject of the Nativity are carols, which include several verses and a chorus, and are intended for singing and the celebration of Christ's birth.⁷ In addition to the carol structure, Nativity lyrics also employ the forms of prophetic dialogue between Mary and Jesus, and the lullaby, which includes a soothing refrain, such as 'by, by lulley'.⁸ Many Nativity lyrics incorporate all three forms. Richard Leighton Greene, in his comprehensive collection *The Early English Carols*, lists almost ninety Nativity lyrics (most with many subtle wording variations) dating from the mid-fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century. In a separate section of the anthology, Greene lists another thirteen separate lullaby carols associated with the Nativity.⁹ These lullaby lyrics, which are my focus here, comprise a distinct

⁶ Brison, *Aftermath*, p. 56.

⁷ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 140. See also *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. by Karen Saupe, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), in which she suggests that carols are an 'appropriate form for the celebratory nature of the event' (p. 22).

⁸ See *The Early English Carols*, ed. by R. L. Greene (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), no. 150A, line 6. Further references to this source will be given within the text as Greene's catalogue number followed by the line number.

⁹ There are two lullaby lyrics that Greene does not include in *Early English Carols*. The first, 'A Lullaby to Christ in the Cradle', is included in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 83–84; the second lyric, 'A New Year Song

subgenre of the Nativity poems, depicting the interaction between Mary and Jesus through the familiar medium of maternal song.

The development of Nativity and Passion stories in literature and religious doctrine runs virtually parallel until the late fourteenth century. Indeed, Rosemary Woolf notes in *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* that all surviving medieval Nativity lyrics also include references to the Crucifixion.¹⁰ In the poems and lyrics written before the Nativity and Passion traditions began to diverge, the event of Jesus's birth is significant primarily because it prefigures the Crucifixion, the sacrifice that would cement God's covenant with humanity. Medieval Nativity lyrics represent what Theresa Kenney terms 'sacramental time', wherein 'the separate events of Christ's life are perceived as happening simultaneously'.¹¹ Thus, the newborn Christ child is always the crucified Saviour; the celebration of the one event is important mainly in order to lament Christ's eventual death and achieve a pathetic union with both Mary and Jesus. To emphasize the Nativity event as a kind of handmaiden to the meditation on lament of the eventual Crucifixion, much of the medieval Marian poetry uses antithesis to structure the *planctus*. These lyrics use the birth of Christ and his loving interactions with Mary as a child to accentuate Christ's adult adversity.¹² In the fourteenth-century lyric 'Ler to loven

of the Nativity', is included in *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 120–21.

¹⁰ Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 149.

¹¹ Theresa Marie Anne Kenney, "Aeternity Shutt in a Span": Time in the Medieval and Renaissance English Nativity Lyric' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1993), p. 1. Recent work in trauma theory also discusses the ways in which the representation of time is affected in trauma narratives. Particularly relevant to the certainty of Christ's death in medieval lyrics is Caruth's suggestion that trauma transcends historical specificity: 'the impact of the traumatic event lies [...] in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time' (*Trauma*, ed. by Caruth, p. 9). See also Geoffrey H. Hartman's article 'On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies', *New Literary History*, 26 (1995), 537–63, where he discusses a temporal schism created by the traumatic event, 'an actual cut in time [...] which divides time into before and after' (p. 543). The traumatic schism for Mary is the Crucifixion, or, in the case of the Nativity lyrics, the moment of realization that her son's death is a foregone conclusion, what Hartman would refer to as 'pre-traumatic stress' (p. 555).

¹² For more on the *planctus Mariae* in the late Middle Ages, see George R. Keiser, 'The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos', in *Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 167–93, and Scott L. Taylor, 'Reason, Rhetoric, and Redemption: The Teaching of Law and the *Planctus Mariae* in the Late Middle Ages', in *Medieval Education*, ed. by

as I love thee', Mary, singing to Jesus about his meager surroundings, tells her beloved child to 'ley thi fet to my pappe | And kepe thee fro the colde'.¹³ Despite this loving gesture, however, Mary also cries, 'thi credel is als a bere [...] Wepen mai I ther fore' (lines 10–12). The lyric evokes the intimate comforts of the Nativity to contrast with the sorrows of the Passion. Thus, in this tradition, the Nativity episode itself is largely occluded, becoming primarily a seasonal celebration and an opportunity for the Church Fathers in their Christmas sermons to meditate on the doctrine of the Incarnation rather than the actual 'historical' baby.¹⁴

The late fourteenth-century manuscript called John Grimestone's preaching-book¹⁵ includes seven of the earliest Nativity lyrics, which are distinct from the Passion lyrics. Although these poems do not appear in a separate section of the manuscript devoted to the Nativity episode, they represent what Woolf describes as a 'new attention' to the subject of Christ's birth, which was stimulated by mid-fourteenth-century mystery plays 'in which the Nativity became detached from its liturgical season' and drew attention to 'a realistic scene of childhood'.¹⁶ While the cycle plays did encourage a year-round celebration of the Nativity, the event was placed into a new context: the entire cycle of human existence, from the Fall of Man to the eventual redemption through Christ. The cycle context is lengthy and complicated, depicting Jesus's birth as one miraculous episode in a long history of other miraculous and theologically significant events; however, in the Nativity lyrics, the primary focus of the text is the importance of the event itself and its two participants: Mary and Jesus.

We can situate Woolf's discussion of the connection between the Nativity lyrics and late medieval cycle plays within the larger context of affective spirituality in the Middle Ages. The emphasis on Christ's humanity in the late eleventh-century writings of St Anselm laid the theological and devotional foundation for affective piety that would be continued in the twelfth century by Bernard of

Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 68–79.

¹³ *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. by Saupe, p. 71, lines 17–18.

¹⁴ Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 144. On the same page, Woolf also notes that, rather than concentrating on the relationship between mother and child, Christmas sermons focus on the awe or marvel surrounding the paradox of *Verbum infans* or 'the Word [of God] that could not speak'. This *Verbum infans* paradox is interesting when compared to the dialogues between Mary and Jesus in many Nativity lyrics; in these poems, Jesus speaks as an adult.

¹⁵ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 18.7.21.

¹⁶ Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, pp. 148–49.

Clairvaux and brought to fruition in the lay devotional programmes of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁷ Anselm's 'satisfaction' theory of why God chose to take on a human incarnation asserts that only a human being can satisfy the debt owed to God through the Fall of Man. Because no human individual is without sin and, thus, capable of amending the wrong, Christ's suffering and death redress humanity's trespasses against God.¹⁸ In addition, Anselm's own prayers modelled an individual emotional response to Jesus's suffering to repay the debt. This early emphasis on an emotional reaction to Christ's ordeal provides the seeds for late medieval affective piety.

By the fourteenth century, the mode of affective piety espoused by St Anselm and St Bernard becomes gradually adapted to the devotional needs of the laity. Whereas the ultimate goal of the affective process was initially a contemplative lifestyle predicated on a withdrawal from the world, later medieval affective spirituality places a greater emphasis on meditation, which was 'recommended as a devotional practice appropriate for those in the active life'.¹⁹ For late medieval affective devotion, a *mental* rather than a *physical* withdrawal from the world is the sole requirement; the ultimate goal is no longer to achieve mystical union with God, but to teach 'moral thought and action'.²⁰ In this later mode of spirituality, Christ's humanity and suffering are more legible to the reader than Christ's divinity. Thus, aspects of Jesus's human existence, such as his birth and death, become the focus of the affective devotional experience.

As one of the two more 'human' of Mary's five joys,²¹ the Nativity scene allows the reader to see Mary as a realistic exemplar of motherhood and to connect with

¹⁷ See Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, trans. by Joseph M. Colleran (Albany: Magi Books, 1969) and Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. by Kilian Walsh, 4 vols (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971–80).

¹⁸ Anselm's theory of satisfaction departs from the earlier patristic theory of the 'Devil's rights'. In this explanation, God took on human form to trick Satan into violating the rules governing his dominion over mankind (Denise N. Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 17). Thus, Jambeck concludes that when Satan tempted and, eventually, destroyed a sinless human being, he 'impal[ed] himself on the hook of Christ's divinity'; see Thomas J. Jambeck, 'The Dramatic Implications of Anselmian Affective Piety in the Towneley Play of the Crucifixion', *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 16 (1975), 110–27 (p. 113).

¹⁹ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, p. 29.

²⁰ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, p. 30.

²¹ The 'Five Joys' of Mary are the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Assumption.

the Virgin at one of the deepest levels of human emotion. Late medieval affective piety advocates an imaginative experience of Christ's life, involving 'fictionalizing [...] interpolation, and recreation'.²² The meditator could easily identify with Christ's Nativity because the scene of a mother and her infant child in a cradle was 'more likely to recall the familiar, and to thrive from this likeness, than any other gospel incident'.²³ Perhaps an even more potent aspect of the Nativity scene than mere familiarity was the ease with which meditators could insert themselves into the scene, picturing their own involvement in the event as a way to explore fully the emotional potentialities of the relationship between the Virgin and child. Woolf mentions several early examples of the meditator's insertion into the Nativity scene, including Walter Wimborne's early thirteenth-century Anglo-Latin poem, *De Maria virgine*, in which the speaker remains after the Magi leave: 'ego remaneo visurus qualiter | jocatur filius ad matrem dulciter' ('I remain in order to see how the child sweetly plays with his mother').²⁴ Similarly, the thirteenth-century Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi* encouraged readers to visualize each event of Christ's life and insert themselves into the action, even to assist in the sacred birth.²⁵ In

²² Laurelle LeVert, "Crucifye hem, Crucifye hem": The Subject and Affective Response in Middle English Passion Narratives', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 14 (1997), 73–90 (p. 74).

²³ Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 147. For a treatment of the connections between Mary and maternal authority that extend into the early modern period, see Frances E. Dolan, 'Marian Devotion and Maternal Authority in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 282–92. Although the Nativity scene would have held particular importance for many women readers, the emotional connection between parent and child to which the Nativity lyrics deliberately draw attention would have had significant implications for male readers as well.

²⁴ *Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. by T. Wright, Camden Society Publications, 16 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1841), p. 196; trans. by Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 145, n. 5.

²⁵ See *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). Douglas Gray mentions another significant textual example of worshippers encouraged to envision themselves participating in the Nativity: an early book of spiritual instruction for a mother in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 416, fol. 12^r. In this text, the mother is instructed to make a 'covenant with [Mary] to kepe hure child', thus accessing Mary's grace through the medium of motherhood. Furthermore, the penitent should 'swath [the baby Jesus] in his (c)radil with swete love-bondes' and 'singe loveliche' to him in order to be granted redemption; quoted from Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 112.

Nicholas Love's popular vernacular meditations on Christ's life, the fourteenth-century *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Love entreats the reader to 'ymagine [and] þenk'²⁶ about the daily events of Jesus's existence. Love renders the Nativity scene in his text with particular care; the angels tell the shepherds of Christ's birth with 'ioyful songe and miche mirþe', for without the child's 'verture, [...] is non sauacion'.²⁷ In this scene of worship — both for the shepherds who have been called there and for the readers who imagine themselves attending the event — there is only rejoicing that Christ is born as the harbinger of 'gret and endless pees'.²⁸

Insertion into the narrative of Christ's life — particularly the Nativity scene — was an important aspect of Margery Kempe's meditative practice as well. Following the pattern of affective devotion espoused by Nicholas Love and other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers, Margery uses the biblical narrative of Christ's birth as a devotional aid.²⁹ She fleshes out the scene to accommodate her presence, enriching the event with greater detail to allow for her participation. In her book, Margery envisions herself at the birth of the Virgin Mary as well as Christ. When Saint Anne is 'gret wyth chylde', Margery becomes 'hir mayden and hir seruawnt'.³⁰ Likewise, when Mary is pregnant with Jesus, the Virgin requests Margery's 'seruise' throughout the entire process:

þan went þe creatur forth wyth owyr Lady to Bedlem & purchasyd hir herborwe euery nyght wyth gret reuerens, [...]. Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys & kerchys for to swathyn in hir Sone whan he wer born, and, whan Ihesu was born, sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssed Sone. And sythen sche beggyd mete for owyr Lady & hir blyssyd chylde.³¹

²⁶ Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent, Garland Medieval Texts, 18 (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 41.

²⁷ Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. by Sargent, pp. 38–39.

²⁸ Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. by Sargent, p. 39.

²⁹ For more on Margery Kempe and affective piety, see Brad Herzog, 'The Augustinian Subject, Franciscan Piety, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*: An Affective Appropriation and Subversion of Authority', *Philological Quarterly*, 30 (2004), 67–88, and Ji-Soo Kang, 'Lollard Repression, Affective Piety, and Margery Kempe', *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, 11 (2003), 43–72.

³⁰ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown and Hope Emily Allen, Early English Text Society, o.s., 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 18.

³¹ *Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Brown and Allen, p. 19.

The focus of emotional identification in these affective meditations turns quickly to the pain Christ will endure later in life. For example, two of Margery Kempe's most public emotional experiences are the spontaneous crying that takes place when she sees a baby boy and when she sees a man beat 'an hors er an-oþer best wyth a whippe'.³² The gendering and violence of the spectacle make her think that 'sche saw owyr Lord be betyn er wowndyd'.³³ In Love's *Mirror*, on the other hand, the first-person narrator postpones the contemplation of the future Crucifixion until the eighth day, when Jesus is circumcised and 'began to shede his precieuse blode for oure sake'.³⁴ Love attempts to evoke an emotional reaction in the reader similar to that occasioned by the Nativity lyrics: 'his tendre flesh was kut, with a sharp stonen knife, so þat zonge child Jesus kyndly wept for þe sorow þat he felt þerþorh in his flesh'.³⁵ Mary comforts Jesus by 'wipying his face, and kyssyng him and puttyng þe pappe in his mouþe' all the while weeping for her son's pain.³⁶ Rather than placing this moment of mournful realization of Jesus's future in the intimate space of the crèche, Love chooses to impart this sorrowful news in a later, more public setting: the ceremony of circumcision that all male Jewish children must experience. In both Kempe's and Love's texts, the Nativity scene as it is recreated for the affective benefit of the reader is a joyous occasion, full of the awe and wonder of God's work and rife with opportunities to serve the child and his mother. However, not all narrative representations of the Nativity are as innocent.

The Pietà image of Mary holding Christ's dead body is doubtless one of the most powerful representations of maternal grief in the Christian tradition.³⁷ However, Mary's Nativity laments, which become a separate tradition only in the

³² *Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Brown and Allen, pp. 69 and 94. Interestingly, by crying both at the sight of a male child and after witnessing an innocent animal being treated cruelly, Margery seems to conflate the Nativity Jesus with the Crucified Jesus.

³³ *Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Brown and Allen, p. 69.

³⁴ *Nicholas Love's 'Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ'*, ed. by Sargent, p. 41.

³⁵ *Nicholas Love's 'Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ'*, ed. by Sargent, p. 41.

³⁶ *Nicholas Love's 'Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ'*, ed. by Sargent, p. 41.

³⁷ See Woolf's 'Appendix F: The History of the Pietà', in *English Religious Lyric*, pp. 392–94. Woolf notes that the earliest representations of Mary holding her dead son come from fourteenth-century Germany. These images are unique, however, in that they depict Mary as smiling and composed, with Christ appearing smaller than life-size. The artist, she suggests, could be depicting 'not the Virgin of the Crucifixion recalling the infancy of her son, but the Virgin of the Nativity foreseeing the Passion' (p. 393). See also Elisabeth Reiners-Ernst, *Das freudvolle Vesperbild und die Anfänge der Pietà-Vorstellung* (Munich: Neuer Filser, 1939).

late Middle Ages, prefigure her Passion laments. Though she is not yet cradling the body of her dead son, she clings to the living form of her baby boy and mourns a future torture and death that she is powerless to stop. The Nativity laments, therefore, deliberately invade the domestic intimacy between mother and child and produce a specific and potentially more acute pathos in the meditator than even the Passion laments. A narrative of traumatic realization is aptly described by Geoffrey Hartman as an attempt to “read the wound” with the aid of literature.³⁸ In the case of Mary’s traumatic lullaby lyrics, the meditator ‘reads’ the eventual physical wounds of Christ through the emotional ‘wound’ of his mother. The ultimate goal of affective identification with Mary’s maternal mourning is devout action, contrition, and penance. These lyrics entreat the audience not to become complacent in the midst of immediate parental happiness, but to remain aware of the ease with which such joy can be lost and to remember the bereavement Mary endured for the benefit of mankind. The slender distinction between maternal joy and its antithesis, maternal mourning, is corroborated in the Nativity lyrics by something as simple as a change of tune.

Affectivity is inherently didactic, and Mary’s emotional response functions as the audience’s own model for affective meditation. Although Christ’s suffering also offers a pattern for the redemptive process in affective spirituality, it is Mary’s behaviour in these lyrics more than her son’s that teaches the audience to mourn and, through that mourning, to achieve a greater understanding of Christ’s sacrifice.³⁹ It is specifically the homely, familiar elements of Mary’s suffering that ‘build on empathy for her motherhood as the crux of the story’.⁴⁰ In one fifteenth-century lyric, ‘Who cannot wepe, come lerne at me’, Mary not only acts as an exemplar of Christian mourning, but also chastises those who are too ‘harde hartid’ (Greene, no. 161A, line 14) to learn from her son’s death. The narrator of the lyric, ‘Sodenly afraide, | Halfwakyng, halfslepyng’ (lines 1–2), overhears Mary weeping. Although the narrator is intellectually aware of the depths of Mary’s sorrow — even noting that ‘Yif wepyng myght ripe bee, it seemyd than in season’ (line 8) — he is unable to respond to her invitation to engage in the same emotional response to Jesus’s

³⁸ Hartman, ‘On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies’, p. 537.

³⁹ Hartman notes that trauma theory asserts a similar didacticism in the production of all trauma narratives. Trauma theory, he claims, ‘assumes that reception goes hand in hand with teaching and transmission, that the materials being studied are contagious, and that there will be a transference between teacher and student’ (‘On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies’, p. 551), or, in this case, between Mary and the meditator.

⁴⁰ LeVert, “Crucifye hem, Crucifye hem”, p. 83.

dead body, 'slayne by treason' (line 7): 'Who cannot wepe, come lerne at me' (line 13). Mary's response to the narrator's lack of an affective reaction to the scene before him produces anger rather than calm acceptance. In Jennifer Bryan's words, Mary's voice becomes 'exhortative and exemplary in the service of public spectacle' as she calls men to the site of the Crucifixion and 'urges the meditative gaze and its proper effect'.⁴¹ Mary confronts the stymied narrator 'with wordys shortly that smarted' (line 15), declaring that he 'must be converted' (line 16). In this lyric, the instruction of affective piety is overt and almost aggressive; Mary demands, 'Now, breke, hert, I the pray' and asks, 'What wight may me behold and wepe nat? Noon truly' (lines 23–25). The Virgin seems to state the obvious in this scene: the example of her mourning over Christ's broken form should be enough to evoke the proper affective reaction. However, she also responds directly to the narrator's specific difficulties, ordering his heart to break and commanding him to 'See, man, thy brothir!' (line 32). Throughout the lyric, Mary continues 'newyng' the statement, 'Who cannot wepe, com lern at me' (line 31), so often that the narrator begins to conflate the images of the mother and the son, not knowing which is 'more deedly, the toon or the tothir' (line 35). Though the audience is unsure of how well the narrator learns his lesson once Mary 'vanysh away' (line 40), we are left with the understanding that Mary is not just a passive model of affective contemplation, but rather a proactive teacher of the proper way to mourn.

As in this Passion lyric, the Nativity lullabies discussed in this essay represent Mary as the key to the lyrics' didacticism. Her role in the pieces depicting Christ's birth is even more illustrative of the detailed learning process on which maternal lament is predicated. The Virgin Mary represented at the Crucifixion (and, by extension, the audience whose perspective is allied with Mary's) needs only to look upon Jesus's brutalized body to begin her mourning. In the Nativity lyrics, however, Mary gazes upon the healthy form of her newborn son, a far cry from the potent visual catalyst provided by the Passion sequence. It is only through the lengthy dialogues with the infant Christ that we understand the learning process, the conceptual shift from maternal joy to maternal loss that Mary and the audience must undergo. That shift is mapped onto the lullaby form in these lyrics. The didactic message is conveyed through the aural medium of the lullaby, not the visual spectacle of the Crucifixion.⁴²

⁴¹ Jennifer E. Bryan, 'Hoccleve, the Virgin, and the Politics of Complaint', *PMLA*, 117 (2002), 1172–87 (p. 1178).

⁴² Most discussions of the model of affective piety that Mary offers focus on the Passion sequence and concentrate primarily on the visual aspects of the scene. See, for example, LeVert's

No secular lullabies survive in manuscripts from the medieval period; only late medieval Nativity lyrics preserve their form.⁴³ The Middle English verb ‘lullen’ (to induce a baby to sleep by crooning) develops from the Latin *lallare* (to sing a soothing song), and the word itself ultimately reproduces the ‘lowly and onomatopoeic’ sounds conducive to soothing and singing a child to sleep.⁴⁴ Orme mentions rare examples wherein the medieval poet represents Christ speaking in baby talk. In the refrain of one fifteenth-century lullaby lyric, Christ says to Mary ‘ba-bay’ and Mary replies, ‘lullay’.⁴⁵ The early infant noise ‘ba’ had pleasant associations for medieval children, Orme suggests, as it was the word used for kissing; its use in this lyric ‘expressed the loving relationship of Mary and her son’.⁴⁶ In another fifteenth-century lyric, the speaker overhears ‘a blisful birde, a blossom bright’ (Greene, no. 144, line 7) who sings simultaneously of sadness and joy (‘that murnyng made and mirth’, line 8). The song is a purely repetitive lullaby, a phonetic free-association of soothing sounds:

Lullay, lullow, lully, lullay,
Bewy, bewy, lully, lully,
Bewy, lully, lullow, lully,
Lullay, baw, baw, my barne,
Slepe softly now. (lines 1–5)

These lyrics offer one of the rare occasions on which the Christ child hears and uses truly childlike speech. More often, he is a full participant in the dialogue with his

“Crucifye hem, Crucifye hem” and Sarah Stanbury, ‘The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion’, *PMLA*, 106 (1991), 1083–93. However, Anne Clark Bartlett asserts that the ‘graphic appeals to the senses’ in affective devotional texts ‘allow the reader not only to visualize but also to imagine hearing, feeling, and even tasting’ the scene depicted; see her *Male Author, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 123. Thus, the sensual affective experience extends beyond the visual in these texts, particularly the Nativity lyrics.

⁴³ See Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 132.

⁴⁴ *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. by Saupe, p. 151.

⁴⁵ *Early English Carols*, ed. by Greene, no. 146B.

⁴⁶ Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 132. Orme also notes that the ‘wa’ sound that babies make while crying was believed to express the sorrows of life (p. 130). Nicholas Love’s *Mirror* notes that Jesus wept ‘oft sipes as oþer children done, to shew þe wrecchednes of mankynd’ (p. 41). The early fourteenth-century lyric ‘Lollai, litel child whi wepestow so sore’ also draws on this tradition, asserting that children’s weeping is the natural response to the sinful human condition. The child is an ‘vncuþe gist’ and ‘a pilgrim in wikidnis ibor’ who ‘wiþ sorow [...] com into þis world, [and] wiþ sorow ssalt wend awai’ (*Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, pp. 35–36).

mother. These lullabies, with their soothing, repetitive sounds unburdened by meaning, not only more closely approximate actual lullabies, but also seem to be examples of Mary helping Jesus learn to speak by encouraging him to listen and repeat the simple syllables she utters. The language lesson represented in these two pieces, however, is reversed in most of the other lullaby lyrics, with Mary — and the meditator — learning the ‘lesson’ of Christ’s future.

Lullabies evoke the intimacy forged between a mother and child;⁴⁷ the laments which emerge from Mary’s lullaby are equally personal, expressed privately to her son. Many of the lullaby lyrics take place in the speaker’s dream vision and open with a version of the formulaic phrase characteristic of medieval *chansons d’aventure*: ‘This endurs nyght | I sawe a syght | All in my slepe: | Mary, that may, | She sang lullay’ (Greene, no. 146A, lines 8–12).⁴⁸ This opening suggests that the speaker comes upon the domestic scene by chance, following the sound of Mary’s lullaby. The situation also conjures up one of the most powerful aspects of traumatic memory: the experience is often a ‘full sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled, and felt intact’.⁴⁹ In this lyric, the narrator overhears the switch from lullaby to lament unbidden, just as the traumatized victim is helpless to stop the recollection of events. As Mary’s traumatic expression reaches ‘beyond itself’⁵⁰ and its own individual experience, it becomes the narrator’s own. However, though he voyeuristically listens in on the interaction between mother and child, the speaker merely reports what he sees and hears rather than disturb the intimate moment. Unlike the Nativity episode in the cycle plays or other affective devotional texts in the Middle Ages, where the meditator is encouraged to take part in the birth and subsequent care of the Christ child, these lullaby lyrics remain private encounters between mother and child, only to be glimpsed by the reader. Their force lies in their appearance of exclusivity.

The intimacy of Mary’s lullaby laments contrasts with her public lamentation at the foot of the cross. In her discussion of the dramatization of grief, Katharine Goodland suggests that lamentation — the public expression of love and grief —

⁴⁷ A similar air of intimacy is asserted in the popular medieval iconography of the Virgin breast-feeding.

⁴⁸ For more on the formulaic opening, see Helen Estabrook Sandison, *The Chanson d’aventure in Middle English*, Bryn Mawr College Monographs Series, 12 (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr College, 1913).

⁴⁹ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994), p. 172.

⁵⁰ *Trauma*, ed. by Caruth, p. 11.

assists the individual and the community in working through the stages of loss.⁵¹ ‘The figure of a woman weeping for a man who is at once her son, husband, and father’, Goodland asserts, ‘orchestrated the society’s comprehension of bereavement’.⁵² Mary’s public lamentation embodies the ‘burden’ of motherhood and echoes throughout the Nativity and Passion cycles.⁵³ Not only does Mary begin her dramatic public lamentation during the flight into Egypt, her strident voice is taken up by the Slaughter mothers, who lament the murder of their innocent children in terms of the lullabies they have wasted: ‘Longe lullynge haue I lorn’.⁵⁴ The overt female mourning in medieval drama cycles undoubtedly culminates with Mary’s heroic suffering before the cross. Goodland suggests that Mary’s Passion lament aligns her more closely with human experience. Although she does not suffer pain in childbirth, her suffering before the cross is a universally intelligible reaction of a parent to the death of her child; her experience embodies the reader’s own reaction.

The lament in the Nativity lullabies, however, pre-empt the public and social catharsis of the later laments. Though Mary’s Passion lament expresses her anger and despair openly at the Crucifixion, the moment at which she learns of her son’s fate when he is still a baby remains privileged; it is a revelation meant only for Mary. Yet the private expression of mourning — conveyed through the overheard lullaby — is still a powerful entrée into individual affective meditation on holy love and sacrifice. The particular lullaby form of these Nativity lyrics is an important element of the lyrics’ didacticism. Rather than simply being a meaningless connection of soothing syllables, the Nativity lullabies are primarily dialogues, mutual interactions between Mary and Jesus.

The lullaby form, originally with its repetition of soothing, but meaningless, sounds, is imbued with deeper significance in the fifteenth-century lyric dialogue

⁵¹ Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 10. For more on Mary’s Crucifixion lament in medieval drama, see Peter Dronke, ‘Laments of the Maries: From the Beginnings to the Mystery Plays’, in *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See. Studien zur europäischen Kulturtradition*, ed. by Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988), pp. 89–116, and Sandro Sticca, ‘The *Planctus Mariae* in the Medieval European Theater: Theology and Drama’, in *Early Drama to 1600*, ed. by Albert H. Tricomi, ACTA, 13 (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1987), pp. 49–62.

⁵² Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, p. 2.

⁵³ Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, p. 64, n. 89.

'She Sang, Dear Son, Lullay'.⁵⁵ This song is overheard as if by one of the Magi who 'sawe a sy3te, | A sterre As bry3th As ony daye | & euer A-monge A maydens songe, | "by by, lully, lullaye"'.⁵⁶ The meditator may enter the exclusive perspective of the three wise men, who are called to worship at this intimate scene by both the Star of Bethlehem and Mary's lullaby. The refrain of this lullaby begins with a long sequence of motherly actions, all connected by what Douglas Gray describes as a 'rhythmical parallelism'⁵⁷ that leads from one stage of the poem to the next. Initially, Mary's attention is solely focused on caring for her son: 'She lullyde, She lappyde [swaddled], | she rullyde, she wrapped'.⁵⁸ However, the sound of mourning pierces the mother's work as 'she wepped wyth-owtyne nay' because of Jesus's own 'sy3hyng', 'snobbynge', 'crying', and 'scrycchyng'.⁵⁹ Mary's first soothing words and activities easily transition into Jesus's own crying 'wyth many salt terys droppynge' (line 15) and are then echoed in his predictions of future suffering wherein 'for [mankind's] loue I shall be tore':

Wyth scorgyng, wyth thretnyng,
wyth bobbyng, wyth betyng
for sothe, moder, I saye:
And one A crosse full hy hanggyng,
And to my herte foll sore styckyng
A spere on good frydaye. (lines 18–24)

⁵⁵ *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, pp. 7–8. This lullaby lyric is not included in Greene's *Early English Carols*.

⁵⁶ *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, p. 7; headnote.

⁵⁷ Gray, *Themes and Images*, p. 120.

⁵⁸ *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, pp. 7–8, lines 3–4.

⁵⁹ *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, pp. 7–8, lines 5, 11–12. The easy simultaneity of lullabies, moaning, and other sounds of distress is evident also in the levity of the sheep-stealing ruse that Mak and his wife, Gill, concoct in the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play*. As the couple manufactures a Nativity scene to hide a stolen lamb, Gill suggests that they sing a strange harmony to add a tinge of truthfulness to their ruse: 'Syng lullay thou shall | for I must grone, || And cry outt by the wall | on mary and Iohn, || ffor sore' (*The Towneley Plays*, ed. by George England and Alfred Pollard, Early English Text Society, e.s., 71 (London: Oxford University Press, 1897; repr. 1973), p. 130, lines 442–44). This reference to Mary and John can be read as an anachronistic allusion to the crying laments of the witnesses of Christ's Crucifixion (among whom Mary was undoubtedly the most vocal). In this scene, the Wakefield Master humorously represents the ease with which a lullaby can be yoked with a mother's physical suffering during delivery ('A, my medyll!', line 534) and, more importantly, with maternal lament at a child's suffering and death.

The lyric concludes with Mary's earlier, ineffectual, lullaby transformed into a lament: 'Now y morne, now y muse, | I All gladnes refuse' (lines 27–28).

The Christ child's prescience about the Crucifixion is a critical aspect of the lullaby lyrics. In the dynamic between Jesus and Mary, the mother is literally educated by the child. Thus, the lullaby lyrics reconcile the *Verbum infans* paradox (the Word that cannot speak a word), which is a central issue in much of the theological discussion and sermonizing about the Nativity. These dialogues figure Christ as the ultimate source of information; though the meditator is always already aware of the future Passion, in these lyrics, Mary is ignorant of this imminent event and must learn about it from her son.⁶⁰ One of the early lullaby lyrics from John Grimestone's preaching-book, 'Als I lay vp-on a nith', opens with Mary's attempt to lull her child to sleep 'withouten song' (Greene, no. 149A, line 7). Jesus precociously reminds Mary of her motherly duties and requests that she sing to him about 'wat me sal befallē | Hereafter wan I cum to eld; | So don modres alle' (lines 12–14). Mary's knowledge, however, does not extend past the Annunciation: 'Wist I neuere yet more of the[e] | But Gabrieles gretingge' (lines 29–30). Indeed, Gabriel seems deliberately to have left her in the dark, assuring Mary that she will give birth to the 'Messye [Messiah]' (line 34), but that she need not know how this miracle will come about: 'Lat God of heuene alone. | The Holi Gost sal don al this' (lines 38–39). With Mary's awareness lodged firmly in the past and present, it falls to Christ to take over the lullaby and narrate the rest of his life story. Jesus offers a detailed version of his future, including his circumcision a week thence, the beginning of his preaching at age thirty, his victory over Satan's temptation, and his popularity among many of his followers. Mary is pleased by this glimpse into her son's future. However, at the moment of greatest maternal pride, Jesus checks his mother's joy and promises that 'thou salt maken michil mon | [and] seen me deyghe sore' (lines 121–22). After this pathetic climax, the Christ child details all of the tortures he will endure: being pierced with the 'sarpe swerd of Simeon' (line

⁶⁰ The Towneley *Scourging* cycle play contains an interesting parallel with the way Mary learns of her son's fate in the lullaby lyrics. In the *Scourging*, Mary learns *on stage* about Jesus's death sentence from John the Apostle. As she enters, Mary asks, 'how farys my son sen thou was here? | That wold I wyt full fayn' (*Towneley Plays*, ed. by England and Pollard, p. 252, lines 280–81). John replies that the 'trouth shuld no man layn' (line 282) and informs the three Marys (the Virgin, Mary Magdalene, and Mary Jacobæ) that Jesus will be crucified. Upon receiving this news, the Virgin begins to lament: 'Alas, for my son dere' (line 314); David J. Eshelman notes that the 'polarity between the hopeful and then the stricken Mary makes her grief all the more poignant' in "Great Mowrning and Mone": Modeled Spectatorship in the Towneley *Scourging*, *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 2 (Spring 2005), 23–34 (p. 26).

123) and hung on the cross ‘for mannis ransom sal I payghe | Myn owen herte blode’ (lines 129–30). Mary’s lullaby then transitions easily into a lament: ‘Allas! Sone [...] | Sithen that it is so, | Worto sal I biden that day | To beren the to this wo?’ (lines 131–34). Although Jesus adjures Mary to ‘taket lithte, | For liuen I sal ayeine’ (lines 135–36), the reader is unable to discern whether the promise of Christ’s resurrection and eventual reunion with his mother — ‘I sal the taken wan time is, | To me at the laste, | To ben with me, moder, in blis’ (lines 143–45) — allays her mourning at all.⁶¹ The powerful iconography of the Virgin both lamenting her son at his Crucifixion and holding his lifeless body in the Pietà is forged at this moment in the Nativity lyric.

The lullaby lyrics where Mary and Jesus engage in a dialogue almost uniformly depict the Christ child as the source of her information. However, several fifteenth-century lyrics emphasize the emotional process Mary undergoes as she learns of her child’s future and then expresses either disbelief or even anger at the revelation. Mary’s delay in accepting the Crucifixion prophecy parallels almost exactly a traumatized subject’s incomplete and belated understanding of the initial traumatic event.⁶² Rather than reacting to the revelation with an immediate, if mournful, acceptance, Mary’s initial reaction to her son’s speech mirrors the actual feelings any parent might have to such news: anger and denial. In ‘Mary Hath Borne Alone’,⁶³ Jesus and his mother engage in another lengthy dialogue wherein Mary learns about Jesus’s future woes bit by bit. The lyric opens with a now familiar scene: the ‘meyden mylde here childe did kepe, | As moders doth echone, | [...] | Sche rockyd hym and sunge, “Lullay”, | Butt euer he made grete mone’ (Greene, no. 154, lines 3–8). Over the course of twelve stanzas, Christ reveals to

⁶¹ Even Christ is unable to maintain this kind of equanimity when informing Mary about his future woes in one fifteenth-century lullaby lyric, ‘It is My Father’s Will’. Here Mary’s lullaby appears as the headnote to the lyric: ‘Lullay, lullay, my lityl chyld, | Slepe & be now styll; | If thou be a lytill chyld, | Yitt may thou haue thi wyll’ (*Early English Carols*, ed. by Greene, no. 147). The Christ child responds repeatedly to his mother’s song, ‘How suld I now [...] fall apon a slepe? | Better me thynke that I may fall apon & wepe’ (lines 1–2). Jesus expresses his ‘drede’ (line 14) of the Crucifixion repeatedly throughout the lyric, eventually concluding that he will never have his own ‘wyll’ as his mother had hoped, but ‘Suffre the paynes that I may, It is my Fader wyll’ (line 24). Without the need to counter his mother’s mourning with comforting words, it seems the Christ child may express his own fears and laments even as he submits to his ‘Fader[’s] wyll’.

⁶² See *Trauma*, ed. by Caruth, p. 5, and Hartman, ‘On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies’, p. 540.

⁶³ This lyric, from Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.1.12, fols 102^r–103^r, was written by James Ryman, c.1492.

Mary more details of his future suffering: he ‘schall be sclayn’ with ‘woofull payn’ (lines 11–13), and he will ‘die alone’ (line 23) for man’s sins. With each new revelation, however, Mary counters her son’s predictions with disbelief, for Jesus ‘diddist neuer amys’ (line 25) and he is ‘equall | To God, thatt ys in trone’ (lines 31–32). Mary’s disbelief that her innocent child will be cruelly martyred is part of her attempts to soothe him; her patient but firm rebuttals to his assertions are mingled with the repeated word ‘lullay’. After all of her objections are answered, however, Mary resigns herself to sadness and her lullaby becomes a lament: ‘Then shalle I lyff in care and woo | Withowte confort alone’ (lines 49–50).

Another fifteenth-century lyric, ‘Dear Son, Leave Thy Weeping’, emphasizes Mary’s anger at rather than denial of Jesus’s fate. As in other Nativity lyrics, the narrator overhears the interaction between mother and child: ‘a mayden I hard loullay synge’ (Greene, no. 152A.c, line 2). After Jesus begins the customary description of his future suffering — ‘for þingis þat schall be wro3t [...] Was þer neuer payn lyke yt I-wys’ (lines 6–8) — Mary’s furious reaction is immediate:

Pes, dyre sone, say þou me not soo!
 Thow art my chyld, I have noo moo.
 Alas! þat I schwd see þis woo,
 Hyt were to me gret heyuenys. (lines 9–12)

As if to exacerbate his mother’s (and ultimately the reader’s) horror at this news, the Christ child enumerates the tortures his body will endure. He draws her attention to ‘my hondys, modyre, þat 3e now see, | Thay schall be naylled one a tre; | My feyt all-soo fastnyd schal be’ (lines 13–15). Jesus continues with a description of his final death wound: ‘Alsoo, modyre, þer schall a speyre | My tendure hert all to-teyre’ (lines 21–22). Though Jesus describes the five wounds that would already be well known to the meditator, Mary offers an equally physical description of her loss and one that underscores the immediate moment of intimacy between mother and baby. She cries, ‘Alas! dyre son, sowerov now ys my happe; | To see my chyld þat sovkys my pappe | So rwthfully takyn ovt of my lape’ (lines 17–19). In this scene, Mary laments the loss of her nursing baby, envisioning Jesus being taken directly from her lap and her breast at the very moment she sings ‘loullay’. This mourning, however, ultimately transforms into anger towards Gabriel, who ‘cnelyd before my face, | And seyde “heylle lady full of grace”, | [Yet] He neuer told me nooping of þis’ (lines 26–28). As with the earlier lyric, ‘Als I lay vp-on a nith’, Jesus must offer his mother a second Annunciation of sorts, filling in the missing parts of the story and helping to transform her lullaby into a lament. At the conclusion of this lyric, the Christ child pleads with his mother to take up her soothing song again, asking that she ‘synnge þis songe “by by lowllay”, | To dryfe away all heyuenys’ (lines 31–32).

The reader is left pondering the possibility of the lament transforming back into a lullaby after this horrible revelation.

The Nativity lyrics offer lessons in maternal mourning, illustrating in various levels of detail how a mother (whether Mary or the meditator) faced with the imminent loss of her child might progress emotionally from loving song through the stages of disbelief and anger, and finally to a mournful acceptance of the inevitable. Though most of the lullaby lyrics conclude with Mary's inconsolable lament, several of the Nativity lyrics, such as 'Als I lay vp-on a nith', attempt to move past the mother's grief, reinstating the soothing lullaby. Although the critical transformation of lullaby into lament begins the mourning process that will largely define Mary's subsequent representations, particularly during and after the Crucifixion, many of the lullaby Nativity lyrics offer a glimpse at the final stage of the emotional process begun with Jesus's birth and the revelation of his future martyrdom: rejoicing in Christ's Resurrection and the redemption of mankind's sins. Although Mary's acceptance of her child's fate is by no means a sign that her trauma has been overcome, it represents a resolution to the tensions created by Mary's initial denial and anger. In the Nativity lyrics, this final stage is depicted as a return to lullaby; the lullaby, therefore, represents both the beginning and ending of the mourning process.

Perhaps paradoxically, the lyric which contains the only example of Jesus using childish speech, 'He said Ba-Bay, she said Lullay', features Christ engaging in one of the most detailed dialogues with his mother. As she encourages the Christ child to mimic the soothing sounds she makes, Mary warms him and wonders why 'My child sud li[e] in hay, | Sith he is Kyng | And mayd al thyng, | And now is powrest in aray' (Greene, no. 146B, lines 22–25). Jesus provides a detailed account of his life, assuring her that he will only live to 'xxx yer & thuo [three]' (line 75), but that he will rise 'apone the thyrd day | That Judas has me said contray' (lines 85–86). Though Mary's song naturally becomes mournful upon learning this prophecy, Christ intervenes in the lament and diverts Mary's (and the meditator's) attention to the 'blis to Be' (line 93). Jesus concludes the lyric by chidingly insisting that his mother return to singing:

Syng me ere,
My moder dere.
Wet souet uois, I you pray,
Wep no mor,
Ye gref me for,
Your morninge this a way.
Sing ore say lullay. (lines 100–06)

In a similar Nativity lyric, Mary's son again chides her when her lament becomes too dismal. The fifteenth-century lyric 'Modyr, whyt os lyly flowr' invokes the same image of intimacy as Jesus 'toke hyr louely by the pape, | And therof swetly he toke a nappe [draught], | And sok hys fyll of the lycowr' (Greene, no. 145, lines 8–10). When Jesus then informs her that 'For this mylke [h]e must deye' (line 12), Mary begins to sing a mourning song, expressing sadness that the nursing which had brought her such joy will also be the catalyst for her son's death. Swiftly on the heels of this new lament, however, the Christ child complains, 'Modyr, thi wepyng grevyth me sor; | [...] | Thy lullyng lessyth my langowr' (lines 19–22). Rather than grieving him with her dirge, Jesus states, Mary should lessen his pain by rejoicing because his death will be her life (line 20). Thus, mourning becomes mirth as the poet concludes,

Swych mornyng as the mayden mad,
I can not tell it in this howr;
Therfor be mery and glade,
And make vs mery [for] owr Saviowr. (lines 23–26, my emphasis)

Not only should Mary's lament segue back into a comforting lullaby, but the poet declares that the meditator should undergo a similar emotional process. The 'mayden' may be 'mornyng' for her child's grief, but that does not preclude her ability to comfort Jesus through the medium of the lullaby or the readers' opportunity to rejoice in their saviour's sacrifice. Indeed, in these last two Nativity lyrics, when Jesus requests another lullaby, he does not expect the naïve song his mother initially sang, but rather a lullaby tinged with the lament she has just learned, one that will soothe him regardless of his future. In the intimate moments that comprise these Nativity lyrics, Mary not only learns the mourning that will dominate her public persona from then on, but also returns briefly to the lullaby form with which she began. The knowledge Christ offers his mother compromises their domestic happiness, but also re-establishes it through the transition from lullaby to lament and back again.

The trajectory of maternal lament first established in the lullaby lyrics comes to fruition as Mary mourns her son's death at the Crucifixion. Unlike the more public performances of Mary's Passion laments in medieval cycle plays,⁶⁴ many of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Crucifixion lyrics represent Mary's grief

⁶⁴ See, for example, Mary's lament in the York cycle play, *Christ's Death and Burial*, in *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: E. Arnold, 1982), and the lament of the three Marys in the Wakefield play, *The Resurrection of the Lord* in *Towneley Plays*, ed. by England and Pollard, pp. 306–25.

intimately as the culmination of her decades-long mourning. The horrible predictions made known to her at Christ's cradle have now come to pass. These lyrics represent Mary as an image of the Pietà: a mother alone, cradling the broken body of her son. However, in 'An Appeal to All Mothers',⁶⁵ the didactic force of Mary's Passion lament seeks to connect with women readers at the source of her maternal mourning: the intimate moments between a mother and her young child. Thus, even at the foot of the cross, Mary focuses her lament — and that of the meditator — on the nursery, the space where maternal love and mourning began. Hartman identifies a potential predicament inherent in literary expressions of trauma: 'how to acknowledge the passionate, suffering, affectional side of human nature without sympathy turning into over-identification'.⁶⁶ However, I suggest that the meaningful expression of Mary's trauma in lyrics such as 'An Appeal to All Mothers' depends on and fosters over-identification on the reader's part; her lament requires an 'empathic' listener⁶⁷ in order to accomplish its affective purpose.

Mary's 'Appeal' begins with a specific invocation of audience not often seen in late medieval Marian lyrics: 'alle women þat euer were borne | That berys childur, abyde and se | How my son liggus me beforne | Vpon my kne' (lines 1–4). Mary entreats 'alle wymmen þat has [...] wytte' (line 73) to use their own children as a vehicle for meditating upon Christ's dead body. The lyric juxtaposes each intimate act that bonds a mother and her child with the five wounds on Jesus's dead body. These maternal acts are exclusively physical and provide the same comfort to the child that a lullaby does. When the mother dances her child upon her knee 'with lazyng, kyssyng, and mery chere' (line 6), Mary replaces that image of comfort with the image of her son, who 'liggus ded' (line 8). More explicitly, Mary claims that when 'þu pykys [your child's] here, be-holdys his ble [countenance], | Þu wost not wele when þu hast done' (lines 11–12). Mary, however, holds her son's head and must 'pyke owt thornys be on & on' (line 15). The lyric insinuates that mothers will engage in these intimate activities without giving thought to their possible end. As in the Nativity lyrics, Mary's reminders are intended to compromise that feeling of domestic safety and to draw their attention repeatedly ('O woman, loke to me agayne', line 25) to her own suffering. When the meditant mother 'playes & kisses [her] childur pappys', Mary notes that 'in [Jesus's] brest so gret gap is | And on his

⁶⁵ *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, pp. 13–16. This lyric is not included in Greene's anthology.

⁶⁶ Hartman, 'On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies', p. 545.

⁶⁷ Brison, *Aftermath*, p. 59.

body so many swappys' (lines 26–29). The child's feet and hands are likewise paralleled with Christ's; when the mother exasperatedly 'takis þi childe be þe hand | And seis, "my son gif me a stroke!"', Mary reminds them that her son's hands are 'boryd with nayle [and] speyre' (lines 37–38). Finally, when the mother 'hase childur on knees daunsand; | Ye fele ther fete, so fete ar thay | And to your sight ful wel likand' (lines 42–44),⁶⁸ Mary jarringly reminds them that 'þe most [largest] fyngur of any hande | Thorow my sonnys fete I may put here | And pulle hit out sore bledand' (lines 45–47). By specifically targeting mothers who enjoy a blissful ignorance of the world's horrors, Mary's post-Passion 'Appeal' invades the familial intimacy — literally from head to toe — in the same way that the voyeuristic 'dreamer' and the assurance of Christ's future suffering invaded her own lullabies in the Nativity lyrics. In 'An Appeal to All Mothers', it is not just the lullaby but the mother's entire experience with her infant child that is transformed into a lament. Thus, after Mary has learned to mourn in the lullaby dialogues, she teaches other mothers to mourn through the medium of the Passion rendered as a Nativity scene; her didacticism establishes a community predicated on shared parental lament.

Barbara Rosenwein defines an emotional community, particularly one represented by and reinforced with texts, as 'a group in which people have common [...] interests, values, and goals' as well as 'accepted modes of expression'.⁶⁹ The texts that lie at the heart of many medieval emotional communities, she suggests, offer exemplars of 'emotions belittled and valorized'.⁷⁰ The image of Mary lamenting her son's death (most prominently at the foot of the cross) was certainly a powerful, widespread exemplar of proper emotional and devotional response to Christ's sacrifice long before the Nativity lyrics became a separate tradition from the Passion sequence in the late Middle Ages. However, the lullaby lyrics appeal to the emotions of parental love and loss in a unique way, very different from the traditional Crucifixion tableau represented in the visual iconography, literature, and drama of the period. These lyrics draw the reader into an emotional community where the pangs of loss feel more acute precisely because they are experienced

⁶⁸ This act of maternal intimacy recalls another fourteenth-century Nativity lyric found in Grimestone's preaching-book, 'The Christ Child Shivering with Cold'. In this lyric, Mary laments that 'I haue neiþer clut ne cloth | Þe inne for to folde; | I ne haue but a clut of a lappe, | Þerfore ley þi feet to my pappe, | & kep þe fro þe colde' (*Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Brown, p. 91, lines 14–18).

⁶⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 24.

⁷⁰ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 25.

within a context of hope for the child's future and contentment in the domestic intimacy between mother and child. Taken together, the Nativity lyrics constitute an 'insistent return',⁷¹ to the experience of trauma. In each of these lullaby laments, Mary revisits the moment of her greatest trauma: not the Crucifixion, but the point at which her most powerful maternal happiness is shattered by Jesus's prophecy, the moment at which she knows and accepts what will happen to him. Whereas this repetition of the traumatic moment could indicate what Hartman calls an 'unresolved shock: a rhythmic or temporal stutter',⁷² the continual return to the crucial moment of Mary's dawning awareness in these lyrics also enables the reader's own affective identification with the trauma. Eventually, as the last Nativity lyrics I discuss in this essay illustrate, the lament may become a lullaby again, a song no less tinged with sorrow, but powerfully didactic in its simultaneous expression of parental love and loss. By invoking the environment conjured by the lullaby form — the intimate space occupied by mother and child — these Nativity lyrics more effectively pattern the appropriate emotional response to the Crucifixion. The trauma repeatedly experienced by Mary and the reader through the Nativity lyrics is not overcome, but is rather reinvested in the production of a devout Christian life.

⁷¹ *Trauma*, ed. by Caruth, p. 5.

⁷² Hartman, 'On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies', p. 543.

NATURAL FEELING AND UNNATURAL MOTHERS:
HEROD THE GREAT, THE LIFE OF SAINT BRIDGET,
AND CHAUCER'S *CLERK'S TALE*

Rebecca Krug

C ounter to earlier discussions of parental affection in the Middle Ages, recent work on the subject has shown that medieval parents loved their children deeply. In particular, scholars have demonstrated that parents felt great affection for their children despite high mortality rates — which had been used by some historians to argue for emotional distance as a necessary component of medieval parenthood. As Nicholas Orme, Barbara Hanawalt, and others have argued, filial concern was widespread in the period, and medieval parents were invested in the welfare and success of their children and sought to nurture and support them.¹ Then, as now, the death of a child was understood as a painful loss and the source of enormous grief, and, as Joel Rosenthal has emphasized, one would be hard pressed to find a scholar of medieval history or literature who

¹ Well-known discussions of medieval family life as lacking in affection and of medieval childhood as indistinct from adulthood are Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Knopf, 1962), and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). For opposing views, see, among others, Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Judith M. Bennett provides a useful summary of this subject in ‘Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide’, in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 147–75 (p. 148).

supports the earlier contentions about medieval parents' lack of affection.² Rather, the general understanding in recent years has been that 'natural' emotional commitment characterized filial relations in the period. Working from this premise has allowed scholars and students to come to a clearer understanding of medieval family life as human, affective, and particular. Indeed, much work on the subject has tended to consider case studies that illustrate specific circumstances rather than offering generalizations about emotional attachment and family life.

Here, I will combine necessary attention to the representation of particular cases with broader claims about what it means to describe emotional attachment in the late Middle Ages as 'natural'. I ask what it means to say that parents, and in particular mothers, loved their children in the period, and I use the representation of the loss (or potential loss) of a child as the means to explore this idea. At its core is Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, a text that, I argue, is concerned with the nature of parental, and especially maternal, love as it relates to complex and often contradictory ideas about affection, allegory, and authority. I maintain that Chaucer's Clerk, in presenting his version of the Griselda story, articulates concern over a trend in late medieval religious culture in which grief over the loss of a child takes on negative associations. This emotional practice seems to have been of special interest to women in the period, and the Clerk's response to Griselda appears to address concerns about reading, allegory, exemplarity, and religious culture that were widespread in the later Middle Ages. The larger frame for this essay is recent historical and theoretical interest in what Barbara Rosenwein has called 'emotional communities'.³ In particular, I am interested in the ways that late medieval writers in England (at the end of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries) reflect various, and often competing, ideas about the value and meaning of emotional experience. I found three ways that grief in the Middle Ages was often described: as a 'natural feeling', as 'unnaturalness', and as a conflict between emotional experience and authoritative writing about worldly (as opposed to divine) affection. To explore these ideas, I work here with three texts that discuss the loss of a child: the Wakefield *Slaughter of the Innocents*, a Middle English life of St Bridget, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*.

² See Rosenthal's review of Orme's *Medieval Children* in *Journal of Social History*, 36 (2003), 792–94.

³ Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). See also William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

If we need evidence that medieval parents loved their children and grieved over their deaths, we need look no further than the cycle play *Herod the Great*, commonly called *The Slaughter of the Innocents*.⁴ This play, part of the Wakefield — or Towneley — cycle, is based on the biblical story of King Herod, but, by contrast with the scriptural account, it emphasizes the conflict between the mothers of the children and Herod's soldiers as the centre of the drama. Herod, according to the Christian scriptures, had heard the wise men say that Jesus would be 'King of the Jews' and, feeling that his position was in jeopardy, sought to have the baby Jesus eliminated by having all children in Bethlehem under the age of two killed. Jesus and his family had, meanwhile, fled into Egypt and escaped from Herod. The difference between the medieval play and the scriptural account is instructive. Matthew 2. 18 reads 'A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not'.⁵ The passage clearly identifies maternal grief as the result of Herod's actions, but does so as part of a larger explication of the divine plan for salvation. The chapter announces Herod's death and provides a description of Joseph's dream — in which an angel instructs the family to return to Israel because their enemies are dead — drawing attention to the sense of renewal that comes, despite the slaughter of the innocents, from Jesus and his family's escape. The passage in Matthew echoes the Hebrew Bible's Jeremiah 31. 15, and in doing so reinforces its message of renewal after mourning. The chapter from Jeremiah, like the passage in Matthew, refers to Rachel weeping for her children. In Jeremiah, Rachel, refusing to be comforted, cries because her children 'are not'. Her mourning is shown in the Old Testament account to be excessive for the circumstances in which she finds herself, and her failure to find solace is represented as misguided. Rather than wail endlessly, she is told, 'Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thy eyes from tears; for there is reward for thy work, saith the Lord: and they shall return out of the land of the enemy'. Israel, the passage asserts, will be restored, and Rachel is promised that 'here is hope for thy last end' and assured that her children 'shall return to their own border' (Jeremiah 31. 15–17). The scriptural account of Herod's actions, linked with Rachel's mourning in the Old and New Testament, uses parental grief only insofar as such suffering contrasts with the sufficiency of the divine plan for restoration

⁴ *Herod the Great* in *The Towneley Plays*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Text*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society, s.s., 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 183–204. Hereafter the text will be cited by line number in parentheses.

⁵ I quote here and throughout the paper from the King James Bible.

and protection. Rachel, as the weeping mother, is a foil for the dazzling promises of restoration and salvation offered in Jeremiah and Matthew.

The medieval play, by contrast, focuses pointedly on the mothers' role in the narrative. In *Herod the Great*, the brief biblical passages about Rachel's grief are expanded, and maternal resistance to and grief over Herod's actions is performed on stage. In fact, in stark contrast with the biblical source, nearly a third of the play is taken up by the women's resistance to their children's killers. The mothers are represented as struggling against the authorities to save their children's lives. As Herod's soldiers make their way through the streets, the mothers, like an opposing group of resistance fighters, struggle against them. One mother, for example, says she will 'clefe', that is, split, the soldier's scalp and claw his face with her fingernails as he tries to take her child (line 510). Another mother warns the soldier to 'kepe well' his nose and offers him a blow 'on loft on' his 'hode' (lines 489 and 491). Their spirited resistance is followed by utter and uncontrollable grief. One mother, for example, echoing her intention to 'clefe' the soldier's head, cries out:

Outt! morder-man, I say,
Strang tratoure and thefe!
Out, alas, and waloway,
My chyld that was me lefe!
My luf, my blood, my play,
That never did man grefe!
Alas, alas this day;
I wold my hart shuld clefe
In sonder!
Veniance, I cry and call
On Herode and his knyghtys all. (lines 521–31)

Another mother laments:

Out, I cry! I go nere wood!
Alas, my hart is all on flood
To se my chyld thus blede. (lines 543–45)

And she continues, saying as she lashes out against the soldier,

Alas, my bab, myn innocent,
My fleshly get! For sorow
That God me derly sent,
Of bales who may me borow?
Thy body is all to-rent!
I cry, both even and morow,
Veniance for thi blod thus spent:
'Out!' I cry, and 'horow!' (lines 560–67)

The mothers' love in *Herod the Great* is represented as protective — to the point that violence is established as an acceptable means of dealing with the King's military representatives. Behaving without regard for their own welfare, the mothers' ferocious response to the soldiers' attack becomes the play's expression of maternal love: true mothers, the Wakefield play insists, love their children and protect them instinctively.

Further, mothers, according to the play, feel an explicit, bodily connection to the children, and respond as if they themselves have been injured physically. The maternal heart 'shuld clefe | In sonder' (lines 528–29), for example, when her child is hurt; her heart 'on floode' (line 545) — that is, is flooded — suggesting that her grief is physiological as well as emotional. The child is, as one of the three mothers says, 'My luf, my blood, my play' (line 525) — her love, her blood, her joy — bringing together, again, the emotional and the physical.⁶ Grief over the loss of a child, then, is understood as natural, instinctual, and uncontrollable. The mothers cry 'both euyn and morne' (line 502) — that is, late and early — suggesting that, like Rachel, they are weeping for their children and cannot be comforted. Further, unlike the biblical Rachel, the mothers in the play demand vengeance. Their outrage against the acts of Herod and his men is palpable and places them in line with the outrage the play imagines a Christian audience would feel. From this perspective, the mothers can be read as figures that point to salvation history. But at the same time, the play refuses to relinquish the particular, human drama: the children's deaths are not avenged in any traditional sense, and the play makes it clear that this is tragic. Therefore, although it is possible to understand the play's physical descriptions of the mothers' attack on the soldiers as, at least in part, comic and, also, to claim that this comedy points toward the larger-scale solution offered in the scriptures, the medieval play's emphasis is on the mothers' experience of suffering and loss. The purpose of the play, one might suggest, is to allow the drama's audience to take part in the maternal struggle and the tremendous grief portrayed on stage.

Representation of parental grief was widespread in late medieval literature. For example, in the Middle English *Pearl*, as in *Herod the Great*, expressions of parental

⁶ The inseparable nature of the child's and mother's pain is a common image in medieval literature, and especially prevalent in Marian lyrics. See, for example, 'Why have ye no routhe on my child?', in *Medieval English Lyrics, 1200–1400*, ed. by Thomas Gibson Duncan (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 126. In this poem, the Virgin watches Jesus suffering on the cross and remarks, 'More pine ne may me ben y-don | Than lete me live in sorwe and shame; | As love me bindeth to my sone, | So let us deyen bothe y-same' (lines 5–8).

loss as emotional, physical, and uncontrollable appear. The narrator/dreamer/father/lover who has lost his 'pearl' declares that since she has been lost he has often 'wayted, wyschande that wele | That wont was whyle devoyde my wrange, | And heven my happe and al my hele. | That dos bot thrych my hert thrange, | My breste in bale bot bolne and bele'.⁷ Like the mothers in the Wakefield play, the dreamer in *Pearl* experiences his loss as physical pain and expresses that grief emotionally. This portrayal of emotional loss appears frequently in late medieval English literature including, for example, the suffering of parents such as the 'little clergeon's' mother in the *Prioress's Tale* and Sophie's father in the *Tale of Melibee*.⁸

The epitome of the suffering parent in medieval literature is the Virgin Mary. A number of devotional lyrics are concerned explicitly with the nature of her suffering over Jesus's Crucifixion. Bringing together that suffering and ultimate joy, these lyrics draw power from the experience of parental loss that I have been describing. Mary's suffering, which is described as torture greater than any imaginable loss and as the most pain that she could possibly suffer, is the agony of the parent who loses a child: 'now', says Jesus to Mary in one lyric, 'tarst thou might leren | What pine thole that children beren, | What sorwe have that child forgon' — that is, 'now you learn what sorrow women suffer who bear children, what sorrow they have who lose a child'.⁹ It is through loss that Mary accomplishes her mediating function: no longer simply a mother, she becomes a suffering parent whose sacrifice is the believer's gain. Unlike the mothers in *Herod the Great*, Mary's sorrow turns to joy as she learns that she can, for her son's sake, make believers 'glade' and 'blithe'.¹⁰

If natural emotion over the loss of a child was an aspect of late medieval emotional life, it was not the only expression of or understanding of loss found in the period. In stark contrast with the seemingly natural emotion found in the Wake-

⁷ *Pearl* in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), lines 14–18; in translation, they are: 'watched, wishing for that precious one who used to drive away my wretchedness and improved my luck and all my fortune. Such watching, though, merely presses down on my heart grievously so that my chest swells and burns in agony.'

⁸ *The Prioress's Tale* and *The Tale of Melibee* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

⁹ 'Stond wel, moder, under rode' in *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. by Duncan, p. 124, lines 37–39. Tradition had it that Mary did not suffer the pains of childbirth when she bore Jesus. See 'Stond wel', lines 43–45.

¹⁰ 'Stond wel', lines 2–3, 57.

field play, we can find evidence of attempts to exchange that emotional regime for a new expression of maternal solicitude. William Reddy suggests the term 'emotives' to describe 'emotion talk and emotional gestures' that 'alter the states of the speakers from whom they derive'.¹¹ In Reddy's view, it is possible for people to change the way that they feel in particular situations. Emotion, he argues, can be understood as a learned habit; as such, it can be changed (albeit with difficulty). In Reddy's view, when enough people experience the mainstream emotional response as inadequate, new emotional communities develop. Thus, for example, the transformation of natural, familial love to spiritual love became a common element of religious literature from the later Middle Ages.¹² Competing with the shared understanding and natural outpouring that seemed to typify the literature described above are models of emotional control in which mothers renounce the familial as a sign of spiritual commitment and strength. An example of this can be found in the Middle English life of St Bridget. A model for Margery Kempe, Bridget was a married woman with children who experienced visions and wrote down, in collaboration with her spiritual advisor, those revelatory experiences. Bridget founded the Bridgettine order, and her daughter Katherine became its first abbess at Vadstena.

The story of the saint's life was often treated in spiritual terms. For example, as both a child and spiritual daughter of Bridget, Katherine, the monastery's first abbess, is generally seen as a spiritual leader who gained her authority from her descent but who proved its validity by her spiritual life. This pattern of taking biographical details and spiritualizing them is, of course, a frequent feature of saints' lives, but sometimes aspects of the lives were less easily spiritualized, as Aviad Kleinberg has demonstrated.¹³ In Bridget's legend, for example, Bridget's third daughter, Ingeborg, a nun at the monastery of Rysaburga, dies suddenly. According to the saint's life, Ingeborg had entered the monastery while she was still 'in hir youth' and died only a 'shorte tyme' after she had made her confession. Drawing on traditions of 'natural' emotion such as those expressed in *Slaughter of the*

¹¹ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 327; see also Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 18.

¹² On this subject of using secular life as part of a monastic, disciplinary programme, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 141–47; Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); and, specifically on Bridgettine reading and Syon Abbey, Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 177–83.

¹³ Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Innocents, the Middle English life takes a self-evidently sad episode and highlights its sadness: when Bridget had discovered that her daughter was dead, she 'fell vpon great wepyng and sobbyng', her exclamations so loud that 'all that were nygh' heard her. Observing her, people remarked, 'loo, howe she weepeth for the deth of hir doughter'.¹⁴ What is interesting about this anecdote is, however, the way that it turns the convention on its head. Despite what we might expect given literary contexts such as the drama, the point of this narrative is to demonstrate that the bystanders' responses to Bridget's emotional expression are actually based on *faulty* assumptions. Although the episode seems to affirm the value of natural, human emotion, the audience to Bridget's grief has, we learn, misunderstood her tears. Bridget's sobbing is produced not by grief but by remorse: rather than crying for her daughter's death, Bridget, after the fact, explains that she weeps because she believes she had given her daughter 'examples of pryde' and 'neclygently corrected hir when she hath offendyd'. Bridget's tears, according to the saint's life, are expressly against the natural, spiritual order: Bridget's audience had relied on what it understood as the 'mocions of the flesshe' to interpret the saint's tears. Bridget, on the other hand, looks with her 'gostely eyne' in order to come to greater spiritual understanding. Following the emotional scene in which she cries over Ingeborg, the legend describes Bridget's vision in which Jesus tells her that 'euery moder that wepyth bycause hir doughter hath offendyd god and enformyth hir after hir best consyence she is a very moder of charite and moder of terys and hir daughter is the doughter of god for the moder' (p. li). The passage, then, demonstrates the same concern with the relationship between parent and child seen in *Herod the Great* in which mother and child are nearly one, but then substitutes religious discipline for emotional response.

The aim of the episode is to teach proper maternal response. The pattern is repeated in the Middle English life. The repetition includes another very similar episode in which Bridget's young son, Benedict, is very ill. Bridget in this instance, again, breaks down and cries, and, again, she does so not because she is upset because he may die or is suffering, but, rather, because she imagines herself as having failed to properly educate her son in the ways of the spirit. Bridget, again, has a vision of Jesus in which He explains the meaning of Benedict's sickness and reassures her that she has been a good mother. The emphasis on the controlling of emotional response underscores the use of emotion for spiritual ends in the saint's

¹⁴ Bridget's Middle English legend is printed in the Preface to *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, ed. by John Henry Blunt, Early English Text Society, e.s., 19 (London: Trübner, 1873), pp. xlvii–lix. Hereafter the text will be cited by page number in parentheses.

life. The saint's life thus suggests that believers should resist natural emotion. In the legend, the reader's familial understanding is challenged in order to enlarge and reshape her spiritual understanding. It demands that the reader respond emotionally to the described domestic situation and demonstrates, after she has had the opportunity to anticipate the 'correct' answer, what the proper response would be. In this way, the didactic nature of the saint's life points at the text's explicit attempt to shift the emotional 'regime' of the age: to use Reddy's terms, the 'emotive' here, that is the emotional expression that voices and reshapes experience, is challenged and revised. The ingrained pattern of natural emotion in which mothers sob and wail over the loss of their children is expressly and consciously rejected in favour of a learned response that suppresses this instinctual and human behaviour and replaces it with practised attempts to promote spiritual change.

Of course, the medieval drama and Bridget's life aim at different audiences: the play appeals to a general audience of lay as well as religious viewers; the Middle English life is directed at female religious and, secondarily, lay women interested in embarking on a religious vocation. Given this difference, one might argue that the exemplary nature of Bridget's life has little to do with maternal solicitude or grief: the legend's narrative, perhaps, becomes an argument about reading, as the text puts it, with one's 'ghostly eye', that is, spiritually, rather than with regard to human relationships. Furthermore, this allegorical reading can be seen as a disciplinary move and not as a simple dichotomy between natural and unnatural. Rather, it can be understood as promoting an intellectualized response to grief (and perhaps to emotion more generally) in which the reader learns and studies (in much the way that behaviourist psychology now suggests subjects can consciously apply learned strategies) methods that deflect the natural approach and replace it with a spiritualized one. If the text of Bridget's life is written for women religious, then this emotional shift is part of a disciplinary movement that aims to transform the emotions appropriate to secular life into those necessary for religious life.

This reading produces a tidy division between religious and lay, and although it seems likely that its broad outlines are useful for thinking about grief, it is important to note that this difference in audience is not as sharp as it might seem: as is becoming increasingly well known, there was crossover in the reading interests of lay and religious people, which bridged gender and social divides over time.¹⁵ By the end of the fifteenth century, we can find a writer like Malory, for example, who is not usually described as a religious or even didactic author, noting with mixed

¹⁵ See for example Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 12–18.

feelings that the ideals of the Round Table, and in particular the search for the Holy Grail, have led men to forsake 'hir fadirs and hir moders, and all hir kynne, and hir wyves and hir children, for be of [that] fellowship'.¹⁶ This reflection comes immediately after Percival has learned that his own mother has died from sorrow following her son's departure. Percival's response is merely that he 'regrets' this but that we all 'muste change' — that is depart from — this 'lyff.' He does not weep, does not sob, and does not mention his mother again. His mother's death is part of the life cycle and little more. The Holy Grail section in the Death of Arthur is, of course, more religiously charged than the rest of the book, as is the French source, but even given this religious cast, Malory's concern with 'forsaking' family seems to be of particular interest. Malory's concern is useful in reminding us that, whatever the religious goals of the persons involved — Percival or Bridget — the family from whom they distance themselves can never be merely allegorical when the representation works (even partially) realistically. If the mother is not an abstraction but, instead, a person, then arguments for her allegorical nature necessarily remove essential characteristics of that representation. Percival's mother, whatever the spiritualizing impulse of the *Book of the Sangreal*, is dead, as his aunt informs him.

The pressure that the real exerts on writers and readers has particularly important consequences for medieval literature, which tends to highlight the didactic and exemplary function of narrative. To put this another way, if we as readers are to imitate Percival, where does our imitation end? How do we know when to move from imitation that works literally to imitation that functions spiritually? Specialized audiences may be trained to recognize such moments, of course, but what happens when readers who have not entered a programme of emotional/spiritual training come into contact with models such as the one found in Bridget's life? In the case of saints like Bridget, it was possible, perhaps, for readers to see where to draw the line. Saints, as any reader from the late medieval period would have known, were superior beings. A saint, due to her holiness, could move beyond the emotional entanglements of a normal person and rise to heights impossible for the ordinary person to reach.¹⁷ Bridget's unnaturalness in this context may be seen as less about her lack of affection than it is about her superiority to most medieval Christians.

¹⁶ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 522.

¹⁷ On this subject, see Carolyn Kinane, 'Sanctity Deferred: The Problem of Imitation in Early English Saints' Lives' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2005).

Yet, even given the possibility of a specialized audience who read allegorically or a generic understanding that saints were to be admired more than imitated, the hardline approach to family feeling in Bridget's life nonetheless feels unforgiving and forced. This, I think, is because the saint's life tries to replace one model of emotion that appears to be uniform and all-encompassing with another that strives for similar breadth: the legend explains, in the passage quoted earlier, that 'euery moder' who weeps because her daughter has sinned is 'a very moder of charite and moder of terys and hir daughter is the doughter of god for the moder'. In other words, at least according to the Middle English life of the saint, this is the model for grief that should be practised: grief must be expressed over sin and not over loss. The transcendent principle here seems absolute: life in this world is to be regretted precisely because it is not pure, spiritual life. Emotion over worldly concerns, even dead daughters, is, in this view, misdirected. The text suggests that what readers of the life need are high goals that require discipline, and even unnaturalness, for spiritual growth to take place.

Although scholars of emotion have not taken up this subject, it seems likely that the impulse of groups who seek to find new emotives by which to express feelings that ingrained patterns of emotion had suppressed — here the exchange of natural emotion over the loss of a beloved child for a rechannelling of grief that takes sin as its object — is to insist on the replacement of (rather than supplementing of) the earlier emotional habit. This totalizing effect, I would argue, is understood in medieval culture as allegorical or exegetical in implementation. The best examples of this are the allegorized narratives that were popular in the later Middle Ages, such as those in the *Gesta Romanorum*, in which a literal story, usually involving a familial or marital conflict, is told and then explicated in a separate section — the 'moralitee', as the Middle English versions call it, versus the 'history'.¹⁸ The moral component shows the text's insistence on a rift between the narrative and its meaning. So, for example, in one story an Emperor has three adult daughters. The Emperor marries the daughters to three dukes 'with great joy and power'.¹⁹ The

¹⁸ On the *Gesta Romanorum* and medieval literature, see Diane Speed, 'Middle English Romance and the *Gesta Romanorum*', in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Rosalind Field (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 45–56; and Rebecca Krug, 'Shakespeare's Medieval Morality: The *Merchant of Venice* and the *Gesta Romanorum*', in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Curtis Perry and John Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). For the history of the *Gesta* more broadly, see Brigitte Weiske, *Gesta Romanorum*, 2 vols (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992).

¹⁹ 'Saturninus a Wise Emperoure', in *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, ed. by Sidney J. H. Herrtage, Early English Text Society, c.s., 33 (London: Oxford University Press,

marriages are, however, short-lived: all three dukes are dead within three years of the weddings and the daughters are left widows. Subsequently, the Emperor goes to each of his widowed daughters and offers to find them new husbands as worthy as the deceased spouses. Each widow declines the offer. The first explains that as her father 'wote well', she is 'neythere feire, ne semlye, ne plesying to mannis ye, and therefore no man wolle take me for love but for my Richesse'. She does not want such a husband, and says she will 'none take'. The second daughter says she will not take another husband because she will either 'love him as muche as him that I hadde a-fore, or elles lesse; and yf I lovid him lasse, then ther shulde be no trew love bitwene us, and if I lovid him as much' as the first, to whom she had lost her virginity, that would be 'out of Reson', that is, unreasonable, and so she too refuses to marry again. Finally, the third daughter declines to marry again because, as she explains to her father, a married couple become one body and 'my body is the body of my husbonde, and if the flesh is dear, thenne ere the boones eke': as long as her husband's bones are in his grave, she will not marry another man. The narrative portion of this story looks like it produces a moral about remarriage: none of the widowed daughters will remarry, even though their father promises to find suitable husbands for each of them. Further, the daughters each provide particular reasons for refusing to remarry, reasons that would be applicable to all persons. Yet, although it might seem that a moral about remarriage is surely the allegorical reading of the story, it is not. Rather, the 'moralitee' provided is, instead, about the willed nature of sin. In the moral, the daughters are equated with souls. According to this portion of the text, marriage is produced by 'synne of the furste fadir', and the enemies of the soul — the pride of life, covetousness of eyes, and lust of the flesh — are stopped through penance. Following this allegory, the three dukes are the 'holy trenite'. The moral explains that the souls/daughters joined themselves to the Trinity through penance, and, therefore, they achieve salvation. This, according to the 'moralitee', is the lesson for the reader: 'therefore late us in this worlde be so unsundirlye couplid to the holy trenitee, that we mow come to the Ioye of hevene'.

This narrative from the *Gesta Romanorum* provides a good example of the split between what feels like an exemplary story (one that seems to provide advice to widows about remarrying) and an allegorical moral (one that removes 'real world' considerations — considerations that were present in the narrative itself — about marital arrangements to draw attention to spiritual concerns). In this story, the two can be rationalized: the choice not to remarry for practical or emotional

reasons (as is the case with the Emperor's daughters) — that is, the exemplary directive — can be matched with the allegorical one.²⁰ Neither stands in the way of the other since both argue for ongoing widowhood rather than remarriage. But what happens when moral and allegorical directives cannot be matched so neatly? The question is pressing when we consider Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, a narrative now perhaps best known to readers as the tale in which a mother is forced to believe that her husband has had her children killed. It is this split between the exemplary and the allegorical that occupies Chaucer's Clerk in his retelling of Petrarch's story, this division which seems especially troubling to Chaucer's narrator when he considers Griselda's response to the loss of her children. In contrast with St Bridget's life, the *Clerk's Tale* seems unwilling completely to allegorize grief as a spiritual condition, and the Clerk himself recognizes the tensions in the narrative that he inherits from Petrarch and Boccaccio. The *Riverside Chaucer* lays out the divergences between Chaucer's version and Petrarch's in some detail.²¹ For my purposes, it is important that among the main sources Chaucer used was a French version of Petrarch in which the story of Griselda is identified as useful reading for married women. In France, this seems to have been a common understanding of the narrative, and this idea is supported by the fact that the story appears, along with a version of Melibee, in the *Menagier de Paris's* conduct book written for his wife's instruction.²² Chaucer does not include a 'good for the instruction of wives' section in his prologue to the tale despite his apparent familiarity with this section from the French source. Rather, Chaucer's prologue is occupied, surprisingly, with a discussion of rhetorical style. This passage is, despite its superficially incongruous nature, important for thinking about the Clerk's ideas about grief, allegory, and exemplarity.

To begin, the Host calls upon the Clerk to break off his reflections on what the Host says he assumes is 'som sophyme' in order to tell a 'merie tale' (lines 5, 9). A 'sophyme' is a pleasing but 'fallacious argument, either used deliberately in order to deceive or mislead, or employed as a means of displaying ingenuity in

²⁰ On medieval writers' use of the narrative portion of source material from the *Gesta*, see Speed, 'Middle English Romance', pp. 54–55.

²¹ *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, pp. 880–84. The *Riverside* notes explain that all fourteenth-century translations lack Petrarch's original proem, which is a descriptive piece about Mount Viso and the Po River; they replace Petrarch's descriptive passage with a discussion of the importance of the story as a model for married women.

²² See *Le Menagier de Paris*, ed. by Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 72; the editors discuss the *Menagier's* source, pp. 332–35 (Appendix I).

reasoning'.²³ The Host's half-joking accusation seems to be that the Clerk is entertaining himself with logic problems during the pilgrimage. This comment is coupled with the Host's introduction of the Clerk as riding 'as coy and stille as dooth a mayde | Were newe spoused, sittynge at the bord' (lines 2–3). The Clerk, then, is labelled, first as himself, then as a new wife, and finally as a vain intellectual delighting in logical problems. This frame anticipates the questions about the relationship between behaviour, allegory, and exemplarity that, I have been suggesting, the tale raises. The juxtaposition in the prologue suggests a relationship between the 'sophym' the Clerk presumably pursues and traditions in which this story is 'good for the instruction of wives'. If it is good for wives, how is that the case? And, since Chaucer removes comments from the French proem, is it possible that the story is not useful for women's instruction but rather, as the Clerk remarks towards the end of the tale, that allegorically it teaches a lesson for everyone about patience? Is this the 'sophym' that the Clerk has been thinking about? For the Clerk, these seem to be questions that influence his retelling of Petrarch's story, and the issue of high versus low style appears especially relevant to his exploration of the exemplary/allegorical divide. The Host insists that the Clerk tell his tale in plain rather than high style. The term high style itself is from the *ars dictaminis* — the art of letter writing — tradition and draws attention to the importance in that tradition of the relationship between writer and audience. According to Les Perelman, in classical rhetoric, logical argument was given precedence. The 'rhetorical theory of the *ars dictaminis*', on the other hand, 'seems to recognize hierarchical social relationships as the principle of communication'.²⁴ The Host's request can be taken, then, along with his demand for a 'merie tale' as an attempt to keep the Clerk from forgetting who his audience is. He is not, like Petrarch, writing a letter in Latin, one that the author explicates and comments on, but rather telling a story for the pilgrims. Further, in the *ars dictaminis* tradition, style was also concerned with subject matter. The subject should fit the audience. Here, as the Host points out, the Clerk is not writing for kings: the desire is for the Clerk to 'speak pleyn' so 'we may understonde what ye seye' (lines 19–20). The Clerk and the Host appear to

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, 1989, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <<http://dictionary.oed.com.floyd.lib.umn.edu/cgi/entry/50231018>> [accessed 19 April 2010], 'sophism,1'.

²⁴ Les Perelman, 'The Medieval Art of Letter-Writing: Rhetoric as Institutional Expression', in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*, ed. by Charles Bazerman and James Paradis (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), chap. 4.

understand one another: the Clerk agrees to 'do [...] obeisance' (line 24), and, after alluding to Petrarch's high style and his original poem, moves to the tale itself.

What is a fitting subject for this pilgrim audience given Petrarch as the source? The Clerk seems interested in revising the French sense that a fitting subject is the exemplary function of Griselda's wifely behaviour. Removing the didactic frame, the Clerk turns the story into a 'merie tale' about Walter's marriage to the poor but upstanding Griselda. The narrative is largely uninflected by the Clerk's perspective until the point, about a third of the way in, at which Walter decides to 'tempt', as the Clerk puts it, his wife. At this point, Chaucer's Clerk remarks that Walter's plan, which we are about to read, makes it impossible to continue on with a straight literal tale. Walter had tested Griselda and 'foond hir evere good' (line 457), and yet, despite this, decides to test her further. The Clerk, after explaining this, remarks, 'Though som men preise it for a subtil wit | But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit | To assaye a wyf whan that it is no need | And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede' (lines 459–62). Here, the Clerk invites his readers to worry over motivation in a manner that fits with neither an allegorical nor an exemplary reading. In doing this, further, he evaluates Griselda's response to Walter's actions in advance of the narrative: Griselda, the Clerk says, will feel 'angwyssh' and 'drede' at her husband's actions. This brings us back to the subject of grief, finally, and the Clerk's anxiety over new models for understanding loss. The Clerk, at this point in the narrative, exhibits a clear preference for the natural version of maternal love. His Griselda, even before the tale shows her children being taken away, feels the loss (to come) deeply. Unable to separate this understanding of suffering from the story as he found it, the Clerk returns to Petrarch's version, in which Griselda appears 'noght ameved | Neither in word, or chiere, or contenance, | For, as it semed, she was nat agreved' (lines 498–500), and straddles between suffering and unnatural Griseldas.

The next substantial change Chaucer makes to the text is at the point when Griselda's daughter is taken from her. Chaucer's addition supplements Griselda's serious, religious attitude towards the loss — in which Griselda shows her 'ful sad face' ('sad' meaning 'steadfast') with a sense of sadness over the situation. Griselda says in her 'benigne' — that is, kind — 'voys, | Fareweel my child! I shal thee nevere see' (lines 552, 554–55) and compares the baby's sacrifice with Jesus's: 'Thy soule, litel child, I hym bitake, | For this nyght shaltow dyen for my sake' (lines 559–60). Jane Cowgill has observed that in several of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, mothers 'suffer with and for their children' and the poet 'directly exploits this image by explicit analogy between the sufferings of mothers and their children and those of

Mary and Christ'.²⁵ Here, again, the Clerk reveals his allegiance to an emotional model in which the loss of a child should be understood as sorrowful in and of itself. This idea is confirmed by Chaucer's expansion of the scene in which Griselda and her children are reunited. Finally, the Clerk can describe her suffering without holding back: discovering her children are alive, Griselda faints, awakens, calls her children to her and holds them, 'pitously wepyng [...] and tendrely kysynge | Ful lyk a mooder' and 'with hire salte teeres | She bathed bothe hire visage and hire heeres' (lines 1082–84). Fainting and weeping, the Clerk's Griselda can finally release the natural emotion that she had held in check throughout most the tale.

But the Clerk, even at the end of the tale, seems at a loss about the lessons readers can learn from the story of Griselda. If he rejects an unnatural model of emotion, in which the mother's stoic steadfastness is allegorized as submission to God or idealized as submission to authority, he also rejects Griselda's exemplary function. She is not, the Clerk says, a model for wives: 'This storie is seyed nat for that wyves sholde | Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee' (lines 1142–43) — she is not a pattern for the wives at all. In fact, if the Clerk could, by the end of the tale, it seems as if he would like to make his readers forget that anyone would suggest such a thing. But neither can he accept her as a *Gesta Romanorum*-esque 'moralitee' of the soul's relationship to the Father or, St Bridget-wise, of the believer's struggle with sinful nature. Instead, the Clerk turns to ideas of 'remedy' that widely influenced the thinking of late medieval writers about emotional life. The Clerk's 'moralitee' is, finally, about the value of suffering, and it is Griselda's grief and suffering that speak to the Clerk's ideal reader. The 'remedies' — books such as *The Book of Tribulation* or *The Chastising of God's Children* — sought to provide their readers with strategies for understanding emotional experience as part of life in this world. This is the path, then, that the Clerk follows: suffering teaches us to be 'constant in adversitee' and the lesson is not just for women but for 'every wight' (line 1145).

The Clerk highlights the connection between his interpretation of the story and the Epistle of James in the subsequent lines, and he does so because James gives him authority for his rejection of Walter's 'tempting': if an allegorical reading of the tale, which the Clerk clearly had in mind, insists on equating Walter with God, the Clerk is having none of it. James, as the Clerk notes, rejects the idea that God 'tempts' anyone: 'Let no man when he is tempted say that he is tempted by God. For God is not a tempter of evils and he tempteth no man' (James 1. 13). The

²⁵ Jane Cowgill, 'Chaucer's Missing Children', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 12 (1995), 39–53.

Clerk recognizes that his audience may, however, be more interested in the exemplary reading that lessens Griselda's grief and emphasizes the steadfast conduct of patient wives. He tries to turn this impulse aside, explaining that it is nearly impossible to find a Griselda nowadays. But the tale seems to recognize that its readers might choose to forget that suffering, especially given the fact that the children were not really dead. And sure enough, the Host at the end of the tale and the Merchant at the beginning of the next return to their desire to have Griseldas as wives. It is left to the Physician, of course, to tell the story of actual loss that leads to the Host's emotional misunderstanding of the story of a child's death.

What is most striking about these examples of late medieval texts about grief is, despite large differences, the way that they all, even the highly ascetic version available through the *Life of St Bridget*, saw grief as reshaping those who suffered. For the mothers in the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, the change was an emboldened sense of strength and purpose against Herod's soldiers. The cries for vengeance at the end of their speeches reveal a deep sense of the way that blatant injustice and horrendous violence mobilized their natural feelings of maternal love and led to their stand against the corrupt authority of Herod and his soldiers. Their individual loss is permanent in the play, but their victory is, of course, salvation through another child, and their vengeance is the horrendous death that Herod suffers in the next part of the cycle. In the case of St Bridget's Middle English life, the grief that reshapes the individual is not Bridget's but that of her readers. Their familiarity with loss, their sense of what it would mean for a mother to grieve over her child's death, despite Bridget's denials, is what makes the anecdote important for the readers of the saint's life. If they are to refashion their emotive grief, if they are to break away from fleshly emotion, this is only possible because those same readers understand natural grief. Finally, we can see in the *Clerk's Tale* how Chaucer's sense of emotions as fundamental parts of life in this world made it difficult for his Clerk to figure out what version of the tale to tell. If, as I have suggested, he was troubled by the unnatural version of grief offered by texts such as Bridget's life, he was, nonetheless, interested in what grief can teach us.

Ideas about emotion in the Middle Ages were, of course, different from ours. The difference was not, however, that parents failed to love their children or that mothers did not grieve when they lost children. Rather, the difference lies in what grief can do for the people who experience it. This varies, of course, even within cultures that seem homogeneous, but by looking at these three fairly different medieval approaches to grief, perhaps we can begin to think about the ways that such experiences reshape people's lives and, ultimately, their understanding of the world in which they live.

‘SON, DEY ÞOU NAT WITHOUT ÞY MODYRE’:
THE LANDSCAPE OF SUFFERING IN
THE LAMENTACIOUN OF OURE LADY

Elizabeth Towl

The *Lamentacioun of Oure Lady* is a prose narrative of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s experience of her son’s Passion where the Virgin herself is the first-person, retrospective narrator. Strangely unconcerned with the physical suffering of Christ except where it directly affects the Virgin, the text maintains its narrative point of view without recourse to events which occur outside of the Virgin’s experience. Although the text as a whole is called the *Lamentacioun of Oure Lady*, the account is punctuated by a series of formal but highly emotional lament passages in which the Blessed Virgin vents her frustration and anger about the injustice of her son’s death and measures the worthlessness of her world without him in it. The *Lamentacioun* becomes not only a record of the Virgin Mary’s mourning for her lost son, but an account of her symbolic, maternal martyrdom. I consider here the context of these laments and their emotional and rhetorical power in comparison with the wider tradition of affective Passion devotion.

Dated to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, the *Lamentacioun* is extant in five manuscripts and a single early imprint.¹ One of the five manuscripts

¹ The manuscript information is as follows: Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS li.4.9, fols 47^r–51^r; London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra D VII, fols 183^r–187^v; London, Westminster Diocesan Archives, MS H 83, fols 127^r–132^v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 596, fols 17^r–21^v; and Warminster, Longleat House, MS Marquis of Bath 29, fols 74^r–78^r. The printed edition is STC 17537, *The Lamentacyon of Our Lady* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, [1510 (?)]). S. J. Ogilvie-Thompson has edited the *Lamentacioun* from Longleat MS 29 in ‘An Edition of the English Works of MS Longleat 29, Excluding the “Parson’s Tale”’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1980). All quotations from and references to this text are to this

in which it appears, Cambridge University Library MS li.4.9, attributes authorship to Ambrose. The attribution of a highly emotionalized account of the Virgin's behaviour at the Passion to Ambrose seems unlikely, however, as it was he who said of the Virgin in Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion, 'stantem illam lego; flentem non lego' (I read that she stood; I do not read that she wept).² Ogilvie-Thompson notes, also, that 'no such work is attributed to the saint, or any other Ambrose'.³ The *Short Title Catalogue's* reference to de Worde's early imprint notes that the text is 'sometimes attrib[uted] to J[ohn] Lydgate', a suggestion that probably stems from a mistake made in Joseph Ritson's list of Lydgate's works, compiled around 1800.⁴ That the *Lamentacioun* survives in five roughly contemporary manuscripts and one early imprint speaks to its popularity as a devotional text. Although its specific author is unknown, the content and tone of the *Lamentacioun* is drawn from a long and varied tradition, ranging from the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, to meditations on the Passion traditionally attributed to Saints Bernard and Bonaventura.⁵ Before examining the lament passages in particular, this paper will discuss briefly the Passion tradition from which the *Lamentacioun* comes and the narrative elements of the text itself, against both of which the lament passages must be read.

The Passion story was taught to the devout audience by a number of means, including mystery plays, mystical dialogues, and meditative texts. Of the last category, two quite different texts require particular attention as, between them, they form much of the basis for the tradition from which the *Lamentacioun* arises. The first is the 'Quis dabit' lamenation, which shares a number of similarities with the *Lamentacioun* in terms of narrative point of view and thematic focus. The other is the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, traditionally attributed to Saint Bonaventura,

edition, which is hereafter referred to as *Lamentacioun*. Line numbers of quotations are in parentheses in the text.

² St Ambrose, 'De Obitu Valentiniani Consolatio', in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne; Paris: Garnier, 1844–65), xvi, col. 1371b; *Lamentacioun*, p. 783.

³ *Lamentacioun*, p. 783.

⁴ The entry to which I refer is STC 17537. Henry MacCracken states that '[t]here is no MS evidence [for this attribution], and the [*Lamentacioun*] seems to be of much later date than Lydgate's [verse *Lamentacioun*]', See *Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. by Henry Noble MacCracken, Part 1, Early English Text Society, e.s., 170 (London: Oxford University Press, 1910; repr. 1961), p. xliii, n. 1. I am indebted to Dr Stephen R. Reimer of the University of Alberta and the Canon of John Lydgate Project for help with this matter.

⁵ *Lamentacioun*, pp. 783–87.

which equips the later Middle Ages with an imaginative report of the events of the Passion. Its account provides a series of common details which resonate throughout the genre and become intrinsic to popular understanding of both the process and the necessity of the atonement.

The meditation beginning 'Quis dabit capiti meo et oculis meis imbrem lacrimarum' ('Who will give a stream of tears to my head and my eyes'), traditionally attributed to Saint Bernard, shares several key features with the *Lamentacioun*.⁶ Like the *Lamentacioun*, it is, at least in part, a Marian lament. After a complaint from the author, establishing the importance of the Blessed Virgin both as eyewitness to and participant in the Passion, he asks her for the 'seriem veritatis' ('true sequence of events').⁷ Initially, the Virgin herself provides the account of the Passion, but the narration unexpectedly becomes third-person and omniscient shortly after Mary recounts her lament at the foot of the cross.⁸ In addition to the mode of narration, this meditation and the *Lamentacioun* both focus on the relationship between mother and son and the Virgin's experience of the Passion as mother of the crucified. Although it is not a direct source for the *Lamentacioun*, Ogilvie-Thompson notes a number of verbal parallels between the two texts, particularly in the lament passages.⁹ The pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* was a particularly popular devotional treatise, dated to the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Attributed, at least in part, to Saint Bonaventura until the early twentieth century, the more probable attribution of the *Meditationes* is to the Franciscan Giovanni de Caulibus of San Germignano.¹⁰ An avowedly imaginative account of the life of Christ, the *Meditationes* incorporates biblical, exegetical, and

⁶ Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 52, 167. I have used both Bestul's Latin text and his translation for all references to this text. The image with which the meditation begins is from Jeremiah 9. 1.

⁷ Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 168–69.

⁸ It is unclear whether the description of Christ giving John to Mary to be her son is from the Virgin's point of view or whether the third-person omniscient narration begins at this point. Bestul has included it as part of Mary's account.

⁹ *Lamentacioun*, p. 786.

¹⁰ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), p. xi (hereafter *Mirror*). For a fuller discussion of the history of the *Meditationes*'s attribution and dating, see Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent, Garland Medieval Texts, 18 (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. xv–xix (hereafter Sargent).

apocryphal information in order to inspire in the reader a fuller understanding of Christ, both as God and as man.¹¹ Jeffrey notes that the interpolation of non-biblical detail into the biblical narrative in the *Meditationes* is a 'typically Franciscan method of Scriptural instruction [which] seeks to incorporate exegesis and commentary into the host Biblical passage within the framework of the story itself [...]. Inasmuch as additional material taught the same truth as the Gospel story, it was thought to be valuable'.¹² The tradition and details expressed in the *Meditationes*, both biblical and extra-biblical, resonate in many of the late medieval Passion narratives discussed here.

One of the most popular direct descendants of the *Meditationes* is Nicholas Love's edited, Middle English translation, the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.¹³ Much of the pseudo-Bonaventuran material is translated without significant change, but Love often either expands upon or suppresses areas of the *Meditationes* better to serve his stated purpose for his text: to focus his material for the benefit of people of 'symple vndirstondyng', who, like 'childryn hauen nede to be fedde with mylke of lyzte doctryne & not with sadde (serious) mete of grete clargye (learning) & of h[ye] contemplacion'.¹⁴ Another notable Middle English rendering of the Passion account from the *Meditationes* is the *Privy of the Passion*, which Denise N. Baker describes as 'a free translation of a selection from the Latin *Meditationes* [...] made anonymously in the fourteenth century'.¹⁵ The *Privy's* narration extends from the prefatory material at the beginning of the meditations for Friday to Christ's appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem, partway through the meditations for Sunday. The *Mirror* and *Privy* are two of many Middle English

¹¹ Please note that the term 'reader(s)' has been used throughout this paper as a shorthand for all types of audiences or consumers of devotional literature, whether they are reading, listening, or contemplating, and whether alone or in groups.

¹² David L. Jeffrey, 'Franciscan Spirituality and the Rise of Early English Drama', *Mosaic*, 8 (1975), 17–46 (p. 21).

¹³ For the purposes of this paper, I shall refer primarily to the *Mirror* and quote from it rather than the *Meditationes*, because the *Mirror*, specifically, is so central to the literary milieu of affective, vernacular Passion devotion in England in the period in which the *Lamentacioun* was composed.

¹⁴ *Mirror*, p. 10. For a full account of Love's modus operandi in his alterations to the *Meditationes* and their application to a particular imagined audience, see specifically Sargent, pp. xxx–xxxix. For a discussion of the anti-Wycliffite motivations for alterations to the text, see *Mirror*, pp. xv–xxi, or Sargent, pp. xlv–lviii.

¹⁵ 'The *Privy of the Passion*', trans. by Denise N. Baker, in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Literature in Translation*, ed. by Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 85–106 (p. 85).

versions of Christ's life (and, specifically, his death) which descend directly or indirectly from the *Meditationes* and the wider tradition of affective devotion. One such literary descendant, the *Complaint of Our Lady*, utilizes details of the Passion drawn from the tradition of the *Meditationes*, but is delivered as a Marian lament, just as are the 'Quis dabit' and *Lamentacioun*.¹⁶ Sargent observes that the *Meditationes* was 'drawn upon' as a source for the late medieval mystery plays.¹⁷ Its influence and the influence of this type of meditation on the life and death of Christ is felt also in the accounts of visionaries like Bridget of Sweden and especially in Margery Kempe's *Book*. By the close of the Middle Ages, this devotional approach was securely woven into the fabric of popular spirituality.

Although its roots can be traced back to the writings of St Bernard of Clairvaux, the use of devotional narratives dwelling on the personal details of Christ's life and death developed most fully in the environment of Franciscan spirituality. As Sargent notes, the first 'prominent description' of the use of those 'meditational techniques, including that concentration of the powers of the imagination on the events of the life of Christ which we now look upon as characteristic of Franciscan spirituality' might be found in Bernard's *Sermon on the Song of Songs*.¹⁸ Because of the centrality of identification with Christ for the Franciscans, their opinion of affective meditation was very positive. Affective piety turns on the identification of meditating subject with devotional object; the point of similarity between a devotee and Christ is humanity. Whether worrying about the effect of cold on baby Jesus's skin or meditating upon the sickening effect of the nails on Christ's hands and feet, it is the common bond of identification which allows for this level of communion with God in His human form. Far from debasing Christ by focusing on his humanity rather than his godhead, as Jeffrey notes, 'in Franciscan popular literature [...] a full identification with the human life of Christ intimates a higher valuation, or indeed glorification, of simple mankind and the human environment'.¹⁹ Franciscan spirituality emphasizes that, because redemption is a result of Christ's Incarnation and death, devotion to the incarnate person of God and his experiences as man — good and bad — is both reasonable and necessary. The Franciscans, because of the itinerant nature of their calling, delivered this message to the

¹⁶ See *The Middle English Prose Complaint of Our Lady and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. by C. William Marx and Jeanne F. Drennan (Heidelberg: Winter, 1987) (hereafter *Complaint*).

¹⁷ Sargent, p. xx.

¹⁸ Sargent, p. x.

¹⁹ Jeffrey, 'Franciscan Spirituality', p. 21.

people. In terms of affective Passion devotion, the Franciscan influence can be seen most clearly in the insistence of such texts on the humanity of Christ by two means. The first method is through his body and physical presence; the second is through his relationship with those around him, and most particularly his relationship with his mother. Typically, no text will focus entirely on either his physical torment or on his interpersonal relationships, but will deploy both in order to inspire the reader to greater emotional connection with Christ as man.

Often in these Passion narratives, Christ's humanity is emphasized particularly in his physicality and the brutality of the treatment meted out to his body. The levels of particularity with which every aspect of the process of Christ's Crucifixion are treated are, more often than not, horrifyingly grisly. The Franciscan interest in any additional detail that might further one's understanding of the truth of the Gospel is manifest in this obsession with the specific way in which Christ is crucified. In the *Meditationes* and *Mirror*, for example, there are alternative methods for the way in which Christ is nailed to the cross. In the first place, the Crucifixion is described with the cross already fixed in the ground with ladders set around it. Christ is compelled to climb one of the ladders and stretch out his arms, whereupon someone who is on a ladder behind the cross nails his hands. The ladders are removed, and, grotesquely, Christ is left to dangle, 'onely by þoo tweyn nailes smyten þorh hees handes without sustenance of þe body, drawyng donwarde peynfully þorh þe weiht þerof'.²⁰ Another 'harlote' (rogue) then drags down on his feet, stretching him out further, before his feet are nailed to the cross. Love explains, however, that not all men hold the opinion that this is the way in which Christ was crucified.²¹ Under the alternative method, the cross is laid on the ground and, when Christ is thrown down upon it, his arms and legs are drawn out and nailed to the cross. The cross is then raised up and fixed in the earth. Love goes on to add to the pseudo-Bonaventuran material that the process of dropping the cross into the mortise would cause 'alle þe senewes to breken'.²²

Such specific details of the mechanics of Crucifixion, which are distinctly lacking in the Gospel accounts of the Passion, become motifs which are used, reused, modified, and elaborated upon in Passion narratives. To an extent, also, the range of specifics available allows for the narrative to be personalized to the reader, as different details will resonate differently with each person. Given the example above,

²⁰ *Mirror*, p. 175.

²¹ *Mirror*, pp. 175 and 258 (note to lines 175.21–22).

²² *Mirror*, pp. 175 and 258 (note to lines 175.30–34).

one reader may remember the image of the man dragging down on Christ's feet, where another may focus on his sinews breaking. Although each text invokes a different subset of the battery of grisly details available, almost all use the concrete details of the Passion to produce a tangible, clear and affecting image of the torment that Christ willingly suffers on the behalf of humankind. The level of detail invoked in these accounts of Christ's physical suffering does not extend, however, to more than the most cursory coverage of Christ's sensory reaction to these torments. The pain he suffers as a result of the torture which his body undergoes typically remains implied, and supplied by the person meditating. The reader, given the horrific detail of the specific torments of the Passion, reaches his or her own understanding of Christ's pain inasmuch as such an understanding is possible. Thus, the perception of Christ's pain is based solely on the reader's own previous experiences of pain extrapolated to match the particulars given in the account.²³

This affective response, simultaneously psychological and physiological by virtue of its mode of production in the reader, stands in sharp contrast to what little emotional response is perceived in Christ himself. His reaction to the brutal treatment which he suffers is rarely dwelt upon. When it is mentioned at all, he responds outwardly with a meekness and selflessness which is utterly incongruous with the levels of agony and degradation that the reader imagines on his behalf.²⁴ An exterior perspective on Christ's pain and humiliation, combined with his silence and meekness, results in a more fully affective response, as the reader comes to realize the behaviour that he or she would be likely to exhibit under such circumstances.

In the *Lamentacioun*, as in many other devotional Passion narratives, this exterior treatment of Christ's physical suffering is mediated through a third party, who supplies or demonstrates the desired affective response for the reader. Where

²³ Elaine Scarry argues compellingly that the expression of extreme pain is impossible, and must necessarily be moderated into insufficient external referents, because of its ability utterly to overwhelm the sufferer. At the same time, the insufficiency of the description of extreme pain or its mode of production makes a true comprehension of the pain experience fundamentally impossible for those outside. To an extent, affective Passion devotion attempts to provide as much information about the process of the Crucifixion as possible in order to increase the impact of the external referents. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁴ Here, for example, is part of the humiliation sequence from the *Mirror* (p. 169): '[P]ei smitene him greuously & oft sipes vpon þe hede, ful of sharpe þornes, þe wech persede (punctured) greuously in to þe brayne panne, & made it alle fulle of blode, & so þei scornede him as þei he wolde haue reignede, bot þat he miht not. & alle he suffreþ as hir seruante or knafe.'

Christ's suffering is physical and indicative of hidden emotional suffering, the suffering of the Blessed Virgin in the *Lamentacioun* is primarily emotional, but frequently reveals itself physically. The narrative is punctuated by a recurring series of physical or metaphorically physical markers, through which the force of the Virgin's emotional response to her son's suffering is communicated to the audience. These episodes are composed of three main elements, often in combination; being struck by the sword of sorrow, swooning, and weeping. During the period between the Crucifixion and the burial of Christ, for example, she swoons once, is struck by the sword of sorrow twice, and breaks down in tears three times. On two occasions, the extremity of her physical reactions is validated by recourse to the perspective of those around her. She swoons at Pilate's palace after he passes sentence on Christ, when, having been 'i-smyt with þe swerd of sorow', she faints, 'semynge to þe peple as I had be dede' (114–15). Also, at the moment of Christ's death, she falls 'adoun vpon þe erth as dede, and forsothe al þe peple wend þat I had ben dede' (203–04). In both cases, her sorrow is so powerful that it results in an episode of fainting serious enough to cause those around her to believe that she is dead.

The other predominant physical manifestation of the Blessed Virgin's sorrow is copious weeping. After Mary Magdalene tells her of Christ's arrest, for example, she spends the entire night of Maundy Thursday weeping, alone, on the floor of her room. The volume of her tears is sufficient 'þat heuyn myght be repleted therewith, and al my hous i-wette with wepyng of myn eyen' (41–43). This Mary, bereft and soaked in her own tears, is the polar opposite of Ambrose's stoic Virgin; not only is she weeping, she cannot even stand. Weeping and fainting mark, also, the reactions of many well-known female practitioners of affective meditation, such as Saint Marie of Oignies, Blessed Angela of Foligno, and Margery Kempe.²⁵ Although they are not explicitly emulating the weeping, weakened Virgin — their tears and fainting are characterized as gifts of grace and utterly uncontrolled — their outward reaction to the Passion of Christ parallels that of the Blessed Virgin and is validated by her experience.

What little physical description of suffering there is in the *Lamentacioun* is almost entirely concerned with the outward demonstration of the extremity of the Virgin's sorrow at the torture of her son. Unlike most other affective Passion narratives, there is little detail about Christ's suffering, and what information there is tends to be reported factually rather than sensationally. The landscape of the suffering in this text is emotional, and almost entirely located within the person of

²⁵ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 14–16.

the Virgin Mary. Where other texts, such as the *Mirror* or the *Complaint*, provide a framework of the physical torture of Christ within which the Virgin's mourning can be contextualized, the *Lamentacioun* is primarily and nearly exclusively concerned with the Blessed Virgin's sufferings. The most eloquent example of the *Lamentacioun*'s lack of concern with the brutalization of Christ's body is the description of the Crucifixion itself. In the *Complaint*, the Virgin gives a long description, following the pattern of the second version of the Crucifixion given in the *Mirror* (described above). The author of the *Complaint* elaborates on this method, adding that the holes, which have been prebored, are set too far apart and that the cross is dropped into the mortise twice, causing additional injury, and specifies that the pain caused to Christ was exacerbated because the 'nailes were ragged & blunt bifore, for hii were of a wommans makeyng'.²⁶ Elsewhere on the same page, the *Complaint* equates Christ's body stretched over the cross with 'a parchemyn þat is glewed opon a borde'. The Blessed Virgin does not recount the Crucifixion passages in the *Meditationes* and its descendants, but she is actively involved, employing a cloth from her head to cover Christ's nakedness after the soldiers have him remove all of his clothing. Even in the 'Quis dabit' meditation, the least gory of the Passion narratives discussed here, the Blessed Virgin watches as her son is nailed to the cross: 'crucifixerunt eum ante me. Et ipse videns me fuit in cruce leuatus, et ligno durissimis clauis affixus. Ego videns eum et ipse uidens me, plus dolebat de me quam de se' ('they crucified him before me. As he looked at me, he was raised on the cross and fixed to the wood with hard nails. I looked at him, and he looked at me, and he grieved more for me than for himself').²⁷ Although the process of Crucifixion is not indulged in to the extent that is found in the more sickeningly physical descriptions of the Passion story, the author uses the Crucifixion as an opportunity vividly to reinforce the emotional connection between stricken Mother and mutilated Son.

In the *Lamentacioun*, however, the Crucifixion is mentioned, but not actually reported at all. The Virgin Mary has not yet arrived at Calvary when Christ is crucified, so she was not there to witness it as it happens. She says simply that, 'by þe tyme þat I come to þe mount of Caluerie þe Iewes had done my sone on þe croice & arered vp þe croice & pyght hit in þe erth' (176–78). The lack of information can be explained, partially, by a strict adherence to the narrative point of view; the Virgin was not present at the Crucifixion in this version of the story, so she cannot

²⁶ *Complaint*, p. 100.

²⁷ Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 170–71.

provide an eyewitness account. Because the tradition seems to dictate that the Blessed Virgin is present at the Crucifixion, her absence and the resulting limited coverage of the Crucifixion itself deserves further attention. In the *Lamentacioun*, the reason that the Blessed Virgin does not see the Crucifixion is that she is so weakened by her mourning for her son that she has to be supported by her sisters, the Magdalene, and the holy women of Galilee. Her walk to Calvary mirrors that of Christ, in that both of them are physically weakened by their suffering; they cannot walk there under their own power. But, where Christ is compelled by his tormentors, carrying his cross for most of the distance, Mary is helped by her supporters to the place of Crucifixion. The physical weakness of the Blessed Virgin and her need of help from those around her is by no means original or specific to the *Lamentacioun*, but the shift away from close coverage of Christ's experiences is unusual, as is the utter lack of detail about the Crucifixion itself.²⁸ In texts which cover the full period of Christ's suffering, from the time of his arrest to his burial, the act of Crucifixion in its horrifying attention to detail tends to undermine concern for the physical suffering of the Virgin. Compared to the suffering of her son, her weakness, swooning, and pain (although important and devotionally instructive) pale into comparative insignificance. In the *Lamentacioun*, such a lessening of attention to the Blessed Virgin's pain is prevented by avoiding the Crucifixion almost entirely.

The *Lamentacioun* shifts emphasis from the suffering which Christ undergoes to that in which his mother can share or which can be paralleled in her. The narrative point of view remains with the Virgin at all times, so that much of the traditionally affective material goes undescribed where she is not actually present to observe it. On a number of notable occasions, however, the torture of the Son and the suffering of the Mother overlap either through their meeting or by means of paralleled experience. These moments also exhibit most strongly the instances which physically reflect the Virgin's mediation of her son's bodily suffering by means of her emotional response. Mary Magdalene and the apostles tell the Virgin that Christ has been taken, beaten, and led as a thief to Pilate on the night of Maundy Thursday, but there is no description of these acts. There is, however, a description of her night of weeping and lamentation, including a reference to her body being weak because of her beating herself in her grief (73). Similarly, there is

²⁸ In some texts, such as the 'Quis dabit' meditation, for example, the coverage of Christ's journey under the cross is very brief, but so is that of his mother's journey. In the *Lamentacioun*, the description of the journey is extensive, but its coverage relates entirely to the Blessed Virgin and only covers Christ's experience at the points at which he meets his mother.

a very cursory account of Christ’s humiliation, where Pilate assents to the crowd’s demand for Christ to be crucified, at which point, ‘first þay bet hym with scourges and þay cloped hym in purpur, and aftyrward toke hym to þe Iewes to spil on þe croice’ (129–30). Immediately prior to this description, however, is a more thoroughly examined moment of humiliation: the humiliation of Mary at the hands of the crowd. In her despair, she cries out and weeps, for which

þay blamet me and seiden ‘Hold þi pees, þou shrewes (rogue’s) modyr and norice of þis traitour. Þy son is worþy to be dede for he disseyued þe peple, and þerfor þou shalt se hym sone i-do on þe croice before þyn eyen.’ And þan anon I fel adoun as a womman in dispeire, þus despised of al peple. (120–25)

Comparatively, the coverage of Mary’s humiliation is more extensive, more physical, and more emotionally rendered than that of Christ.

The fall under the cross becomes another moment of collective suffering. Having finally caught up with Christ, she laments, asking him:

O my swet son Ihesu, whi gost þou þus fast so heuily i-charget with þat croice? What þynkest þou to do with þy moder, to let me thus allone and in dispeire? Þynkest þou forsak me þus? O swet sone Ihesu, tak me (give me), þy modyr, þe croice, and I shal bere hit vpon myn owne bak. And son, dey þou nat without þy modyre, ne go þou nat fro þy modyre, bot, my swet sone, let vs lyue togydderes and dey togidderes. (147–54)

This pleading results in so much pity in Christ for his mother — more than for all the pain that he suffered himself, the author notes — that he falls down beneath the cross. Mary, because of the sorrow that she feels for her son, falls in a swoon also. Their shared moment of suffering and mutual pity results in their both being ‘al to-troden of þe peple’ (160).

The refocusing of the narrative amplifies particular affective moments which pertain to the emotions of the Virgin, rather than those of Christ. Christ is never seen except in the context of his mother’s experience of his Passion and the reports of others for her information. The strict and unflinching maintenance of the narrative point of view is peculiar, in that so many of the events of the Passion remain untold. The author of the *Lamentacioun* emphasizes the humanity of Christ primarily in terms of his relationship with his mother and in her suffering, rather than in horrifyingly particular details of his brutalization. The thematic focus in many devotional texts on the compassion of the Virgin and on her position as ‘fellow-sufferer with Christ’ as a ‘representative of humanity’, helped to bridge the gap between Christ’s suffering and those for whose redemption it was intended.²⁹ In

²⁹ Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, p. 37.

the *Lamentacioun*, however, the centrality of the Virgin Mary's point of view gives her, as Christ's mother, every opportunity to reflect his humanity in her motherhood. The affective response is initiated, partially, in the reader's identification with him as 'some mother's son' and validated by the Virgin Mary's position as eyewitness to and partaker in his suffering. The well-worn events of the Passion of Christ remain, largely unremarked, in the background; it is the Blessed Virgin's emotional suffering which occupies the central position of the text. This version of the Passion story is not an account of the redemption of mankind, or even of the suffering of Christ by which that redemption is achieved; the *Lamentacioun* memorializes the mourning of a mother for her lost child. Even the opening words of the text, 'Whan that I, Mary, Iesu moder' (1), emphasize the centrality of this relationship.

This mother/child relationship is insisted upon repeatedly throughout the *Lamentacioun*. Mary's references to her '(dere/swet) sone (Ihesu)' become a refrain within the text. She refers to him as something other than as her child or son only four times: he is 'that (lothles) lambe' (119, 169–70, 173), an innocent lamb who is her 'most loue Ihesu' or most beloved (181), and he is 'clene fleish and vnwemmed' (231–32). Similarly, of the twenty-five instances where Mary refers to herself, only five do not contain the concept 'moder', and four of those five constitute her referring to herself by her name alone. In the remaining instance, she calls herself 'most vnworthiest of al wymmen' (45–46). Christ, on the other hand, never refers to himself, and he refers to the Virgin Mary only three times. Just as in the Gospel according to John, he begins the sermon from the cross by calling Mary 'woman'.³⁰ Subsequently, he refers to her twice, simply, as 'modyr(e)' (193, 197). The Blessed Virgin once provides an additional reference to herself, seemingly from Christ's point of view, where she notes that it is the suffering of 'his owne moder' (156), rather than the physical suffering that he is experiencing, which causes him to fall under the cross.

The insistent use of mother/child forms of address carries over, also, into the forms of address used by the other people present during the Passion. Most of the forms of address used to Mary note her motherhood, and most of the forms used of Christ to Mary are based on the concept 'your son'. Mary Magdalene, for example, begins her ill tidings of Christ's arrest with 'Come to me a-down, most deuout of al women, mayd þat liest þer i-hidde and modyr berauysed (bereaved) of þy sone' (24–25). Interestingly, even the Jews outside Pilate's palace recognize Mary's

³⁰ John 19. 26, and *Lamentacioun*, line 188.

motherhood, calling her a 'shrewes modyr and norice of þis traitour' (121–22). Mary's role as mother of Christ gives her an especially privileged position of emotional involvement and mourning. It is through this emotional suffering, in which no other person can fully participate, that the most affective moments are realized. The Blessed Virgin regularly emphasizes a feeling that she is alone in her grief and contrasts her experience of mourning with that of those around her. Her description of her weeping and lament over the night of Maundy Thursday both begins and ends with references to her solitude and lack of help. At the beginning of her ordeal she notes that 'mannys help had I none' (40), and afterward, early on the morning of Good Friday, she describes herself as 'faylynge al mannys help' (63–64). Even when the women half carry, half accompany her from her home to Jerusalem and on to Golgotha, she uses 'I' rather than 'we' to describe the action on the journey.

The deposition and burial of Christ are most indicative of the Blessed Virgin's privileged position of grief in comparison with those around her. Of the comparative approach to the representation of mourning, Spargo explains that 'almost every literary work of mourning develops a dialectic between those who are outside (those, for example, who have mourned inadequately) and the mourner who is truly dedicated to the memory of the other she laments'.³¹ The deposition and burial passages in the *Lamentacioun* provide valuable opportunities for the mourning Mother to be compared with the mourning others; Joseph of Arimathea and his 'felawes', the Holy Women, the Magdalene, and John look on reverently, but the Virgin kisses and laments over the body of her son. Initially, immediately after Christ is removed from the cross and given to her, she seems to find some comfort in having the physical presence of Christ in her hands and helps to wash and to anoint the body. She is suddenly overcome, however, again struck by the sword of sorrow, and begins an extensive lament over Christ's body. After the lament, Joseph and his companions attempt to bind the body, which the Virgin, in her grief, cannot countenance, and she unbinds it again. She notes that for a long time she cannot allow his body to be bound, and, as a result of her sorrow, 'þey al þat þer stode ne myght nat take þe dede body of my sone Ihesu out of my handes' (250–51). The mourning of those watching the Virgin does not seem insufficient, necessarily. Their sorrow is appropriate to their relationship with Christ; their relative emotional distance from Christ allows for a degree of pragmatism in which the Virgin is utterly unable to participate. Equally, given the special relationship

³¹ R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 5.

between the Mother and the Son, her behaviour is also appropriate to her feelings and the closeness of the bond between them. There is no indication in the text that either behaviour is inappropriate, either in its possible melodrama or comparative inadequacy.

Part of the affective impact of the *Lamentacioun* exists in the tension between the reporting of such events without reference to their outcomes and the reader's socially ingrained knowledge of how the Passion actually plays out. As in the mystery plays, where the events of the Passion are played out as they occur, the narration of the *Lamentacioun* strictly adheres to the moment in hand, seemingly unaware of the outcomes of the narrative as it unfolds. Outside Pilate's palace, for example, when Pilate nearly exonerates Christ, the Blessed Virgin experiences a moment of hope, where 'I lift vp my hert as þogh I had be arered fro deth to lyue, and hoped þat Baraban þe mansleer shold haue be put to deth, and my swet son Ihesu i-let go alyue' (107–10). The narrator knows, as does the audience, that the crowd will demand Christ's life, rather than Barabbas's, that Christ will die, and that he will rise, but there is no indication of that awareness from the narrator at that moment. Both the audience and the narrator-persona of the Virgin know that her hope that her son will be returned safely to her is futile, but also that her son will rise again on the third day. Her current mourning is unmitigated by her future joy. The Virgin's emotion is represented most explicitly and most immediately in the laments that she utters in the course of her Passion account. The narrative sections are given in the past tense, but the Marian laments are reported speech and are, therefore, rendered as present-tense moments embedded in the retrospective narrative. In this way, by means of the lack of temporal differentiation from the moment at which they were originally uttered, they invoke an implied 'devotional present'. The devotional present, a term coined by Rhodes, concerns the deliberate and explicit attempts by an author of a devotional work imaginatively to close the temporal gap between an event and the readers meditating upon it, and to cause them to feel as though they are physically present there.³² This effect is achieved by rehearsing the event in vivid detail while calling upon the audience to, for example,

³² See J. T. Rhodes, 'The Body of Christ in English Eucharistic Devotion, c. 1500–c. 1620', in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. by Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995), pp. 388–419. See also R. N. Swanson, 'Passion and Practice: The Social and Ecclesiastical Implications of Passion Devotion in the Late Middle Ages', in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. by A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann, Mediaevalia Groningana, 21 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), pp. 1–30.

'behold' or 'see' these details³³ — crucially, to be in the moment of this visual experience.

The devotional immediacy with which the lament passages in particular are presented has the same effect. There is no temporal differentiation between the laments as represented in the *Lamentacioun* and their declamation during the course of the Passion itself; the suffering encapsulated therein is just as raw and unresolved. Readers are required to lose themselves, to one extent or another, in the Blessed Virgin's pain and her experience of the Passion, even though there are no direct injunctions to do so. We 'behold' and 'see', or, rather, feel and suffer, because she does. The comparative lack of physical, visual detail increases the impact of the more auditory and emotional aspects of the narrative, which enables the reader to participate imaginatively in the events of the Passion by those means rather than through visualization. The vividness of the lament passages in particular causes the reader to slip unbidden into the devotional present.

The Marian lament as a distinct form descends from the lyric *planctus Mariae*: independent poetic renderings of the Virgin's emotions as she stands, sorrowing, near the cross. This particular form of lyric complaint was adopted in the early stages of the development of Latin liturgical drama.³⁴ As with the other aspects of Marian devotion discussed in this paper, these complaints humanized the Virgin and, by extension, the relationship with her son, by allowing her to express 'her grief in her own person'. The Latin *planctus*, however, with its 'ceremonially distanced style [...] invited the listening congregation to *lament* rather than to *suffer* with Mary'.³⁵ This type of formal complaint found its way into various popular Passion accounts and into the *Lamentacioun*. In the *Lamentacioun*, the Virgin offers five main laments, each of them at particularly affective moments in the narrative: the night of Maundy Thursday, on the road to Golgotha, at the foot of the cross, at the deposition, and at the entombment. The first begins as a lament to God, but soon moves to address the Archangel Gabriel, who is also the

³³ Rhodes, 'Body of Christ', pp. 389–90.

³⁴ Sandro Sticca, *The 'Planctus Mariae' in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 5. For further information on the details of this development, see Sticca, 'Planctus Mariae'; and with reference to the Latin tradition and its connections with the Middle English mystery cycle in particular, see Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), and Hans-Jürgen Diller, *The Middle English Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form*, trans. by Frances Wessels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁵ Diller, *Middle English Mystery Play*, pp. 45 and 182 (Diller's italics).

predominant focus of the last lament. The intervening three laments are addressed to Christ. In all of the laments, the Blessed Virgin verbally attacks the situation in which she finds herself; she is alone in her grief, and the only thing which gave her life meaning either will be, is being, or has been taken from her. In the first three laments, while Christ is still alive, the complaints are characterized by beginning with a series of questions about the Blessed Virgin's situation and future. After Christ's death, however, the laments bewail the necessity of his death, the worthlessness of the Virgin's life without him, and the utter failure of the angelic salutation. The laments also demonstrate a disturbing (but psychologically realistic) egocentrism. Her understandable rage and desolation at the death of her innocent son — which in other Passion narratives is often either moderated into formal, humble speech or repressed altogether and expressed only in fainting and tears — swells and overflows in these lament passages.

The first lament, which follows the news of Christ's arrest, has no parallel in some of the devotional narratives discussed here.³⁶ In the *Meditationes* and its descendants, however, the Blessed Virgin makes a formal petition to God after John brings word to her of the arrest. The central section of the Virgin Mary's petition from the *Mirror* is as follows:

Fadere euerlastyng, wheper my dere sone shale be dede? Sopely he dide neuer ille. Bot rihtwise fadere, if 3he wole þe redempcion of manykynde, I beseke 3ow if it may be þat it be fulfillede by a noþer maner, & þat my sone be not dede if it be 3our wille, for alle þinge is possible to 3ow.³⁷

Her argument is logical, reverent, and gentle and based on two theological truths: that Christ did not deserve to die and that God is omnipotent. Here, however, is the lament from the equivalent moment in the *Lamentacioun*:

O holy Fadyr, where ben þy trew behestis? Whi woldest þou ordeyn me to be a modyr and make me riche with a child, and now I am bereued of child and left alone, most vnworthiest of al wymmen. O angel Gabriel, where is now the begynnyng of þy gretynge? Where is now þat same blisse that þou behete me? Where is now þat same holsomenes (fullness) of grace þat þou behete me? O Gabriel, why woldest þou scorne with me, most vnworthiest of al modres? Behold now, Gabriel, for þe ioi þat þou behete me, I haue now payne, and for the gladnesse now haue I sorow, and for þe modyrhede I am bereued of my child, and for grace I haue sham, and for lyf I haue deth, and for the blisse þou behete me now is become cors vpon me. (43–55)

³⁶ The 'Quis dabit', for example, does not cover Maundy Thursday, and the *Complaint* focuses on the treatment of Christ over that night rather than the suffering of his mother.

³⁷ *Mirror*, p. 169.

By comparison, the Blessed Virgin's complaint borders on blasphemy, in that she very nearly questions God's wisdom in giving her a son, only to take him away from her. Although a certain amount of rhetorical control remains, specifically in the section directly contrasting her joy at the Annunciation with her current sorrow, her angry, self-centred response to the arrest of her son is psychologically more realistic than the devout, humble petition made by the Mary of the *Mirror*. The *N-Town Betrayal* play features a lament which occupies an intermediate position between these two approaches.³⁸ The opening section is addressed to Christ and is grief-stricken, characterized by two stanzas beginning 'A! A! A!', while the latter half, addressed to God the Father, is more restrained and follows essentially the same argument as that found in the *Mirror*.

The *Lamentacioun*'s second, comparatively short lament (quoted in full above) occurs when the Virgin meets Christ carrying the cross (147–54). The meeting on the road to Golgotha is a common theme in affective Passion narratives, although often mother and son are unable to speak to each other. This inability is due, usually, either to the crowds separating them or, as in the *Meditationes* and *Mirror*, because of the great sorrow which the Virgin suffers at the sight of her son carrying the cross and the haste with which he is led to his death. The detail of the Virgin attempting to carry the cross on Christ's behalf is present in both the *Complaint* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*. In the *Book*, Margery sees her actually attempt to carry the cross, but Mary is so weak that she falls, 'and lay stille as it had ben a ded woman',³⁹ which causes Christ voluntarily to lie down beside her and comfort her. In neither of these texts does the Virgin lament at this point, however, so the complaint given in the *Lamentacioun* and, especially, its resulting emotional-to-physical response in Christ, is noteworthy. The third episode of formal lament occupies the traditional position of Marian complaint; the foot of the cross between Christ's Crucifixion and his death. As such, it has parallels and comparisons in all of the examples of affective Passion devotion discussed here. In the *Lamentacioun*, it is comparatively short and focuses on the Virgin's feelings of abandonment, rather than the Crucifixion and suffering of her son:

O my swet sone Ihesu, O my most loue Ihesu, whi lokest þou nat vpon þy sorowful modyre? Why spekest þou nat to þy sorowful modyr? Why wilt þou leue me thus allone? Whidyr shal I go, my swete sone Ihesu? In what house shal I rest, my swete sone Ihesu? Thogh þou haue no reuth (pity) on þy self, haue reuth on þy sorowful modyr. (180–86)

³⁸ *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*, ed. by Stephen Spector, Early English Text Society, s.s., 11 (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 292–93.

³⁹ *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 346.

These questions and pleas from the Blessed Virgin precipitate Christ's 'words from the cross': explaining the necessity of the atonement, asking her to take comfort in the fact that his Passion is the will of God, giving her into the care of John, and providing John as a surrogate son. The 'words from the cross' in the 'Quis Dabit' meditation are also the result of the Virgin's complaint. This section includes a very eloquent moment of understanding between Christ and Mary, which provides all of the information and comfort given in the explicatory section of Christ's reported speech in the *Lamentacioun*.⁴⁰ The Marian complaint itself, though featuring a number of verbal similarities, differs significantly from that found in the *Lamentacioun*. It is much longer, and although seemingly equally unconcerned with the suffering of Christ, the Virgin's complaint focuses predominantly on a desire for her own death and a hopelessness about her future. She asks, formally and repeatedly, to die either in the place of or, failing that, with her son. Finally, humbly, she asks for his 'consilium' (advice) as to how she will continue without him.⁴¹ This humility and formality is in keeping with the highly wrought style of the 'Quis dabit' as a whole, but slightly at odds with the raw emotion one might expect and which can be found in the *Lamentacioun*.

The lament section at the foot of the cross from the Towneley cycle *Crucifixion* play is divided between Mary's lament and John's ministrations towards her in her grief.⁴² Mary's laments are, in turn, divided into two types; the laments early in the section are measured and at least partially concerned with describing the damage to Christ's body, while the later laments are highly emotional, raw appeals. All of John's laments are of this second, more emotional, type. Diller notes that the two distinct tones in these two types of lament found in the Towneley *Crucifixion* are reflected in two different metrical stanzas, probably reflecting two separate sources.⁴³ The *Book of Margery Kempe* offers the most interesting (and most character-defining) of all of the laments. The appeal lies in the fact that, as is her

⁴⁰ The narrative preamble to Christ's explanation begins, 'Corde metissimus, lacrimis semper plorans, ac si dominus diceret' ('Sad in heart and ever weeping, it was *as if* the lord said') (my emphasis). It would appear, therefore, that the speech that follows is not actually verbal, but lies behind the words 'Mulier, ecce filius tuus' (Woman, behold your son), and is implied by Christ's expression. See Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 172–73.

⁴¹ Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 170–73.

⁴² *The Towneley Plays*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Text*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society, s.s., 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 296–302.

⁴³ For a full discussion of the stanzaic form of the Towneley laments, see Diller, *Middle English Mystery Play*, pp. 185–86.

wont, Margery weaves herself into the narrative by appropriating two of the three short laments in this section. The Virgin Mary makes the first lament, where she attacks the Jews for killing her son, who 'dede [...] yow nevyr no harme'.⁴⁴ The Jews then take her away, and Margery steps into the role of chief mourner, weeping and crying, asking the Jews to kill her rather than Christ and asking Christ what she and his 'careful modyr' will do and how they will bear his loss. Though obviously unusual, Margery's mystical act of mourning is indicative of the protective, collaborative fervour that this type of devotion is intended to promote.

The deposition lament is also found in many Passion narratives and occupies a narrative position between Christ's death and burial. Addressed to Christ's body either while it still hangs on the cross or when it is laid in her lap, this lament considers the feelings of the Virgin when her son is dead and there is nothing she can do. In the 'Quis dabit' meditation, her lament is characterized by its being split into a series of sections spread across the postdeath, preburial account. She begins while he is still on the cross, begging for his dead body. After a long narrative break, which describes her swooning and essentially bathing in and imbibing the blood dripping from the cross, she laments again on Christ's innocence and her grief. There is a pause in this second part of the complaint while she embraces the dead body and kisses his wounds. The deposition lament in the *Lamentacioun* is, in many ways, very similar to that found in the 'Quis dabit', in form and length. The section as a whole, however, does not take up the space that it does in the 'Quis dabit', as it is not spread out across the entire death-to-burial period. The lament is essentially one speech, with a brief pause to embrace and kiss the dead body:

O clene fleish and vnwemmed fleishe þat liest þer, þou þat were my fleishe, whi woldest þou þus dey on the croice and be offred for syn, for þou art holy fleishe and clene fro al manere of syn, and þou hast sore boght þe syn of al men. [...] O my swet sone Ihesu, I, thy wreched modyr, wend neuer haue seyne þis of the, neþer þese sorowes haue suffred for þe, bot myche more I beleued to haue had singuler ioyes of þe. (231–35, 241–44)

Both the *Lamentacioun* and the 'Quis dabit' dwell on Christ's innocence and his sacrifice for the redemption of mankind, and discuss Christ as flesh rather than self. The interest in this section of this particular lament lies in the Blessed Virgin's statement that she has 'suffred for [him]', which constitutes both a verbal assertion of the symbolic martyrdom of the Virgin during the Passion of her son and an explicit avowal of the thematic purpose of the text as a record of her maternal sacrifice.

⁴⁴ *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 348.

The fifth and final lament occurs at Christ's sepulchre and, in almost all of the texts considered here, revolves around one theme: Mary's utter reluctance to relinquish contact with her son's body to the extent of wishing to be buried with him. Having lost the one important person in her life — whom she describes as her spouse, son, and father — the Mary of the *Complaint*, for example, begs those around her to 'vndo [...] þis gret ston & lete [...] þis cheityf (caitiff) lye & dye wiþ hir son'.⁴⁵ The *Lamentacioun*'s burial lament begins with the Virgin pleading, '[b]ir[y] me with hym, for I may nat lyue withouten hym' (261–62), but the lament proper is directed at Gabriel and undermines each of the clauses of the angelic salutation one by one. For each of the joys and benefits that the Archangel Gabriel promises the Virgin at the Annunciation, she finds in her current overwhelming grief and desolation a counterpoint.⁴⁶ She points out to Gabriel, for example, that 'Pou seidest also to me "Oure Lord is with the", and behold now my lord and my sone is put away for me þat I may nat hym see' (268–70). Although this explicit comparison between the joy of the Annunciation and the despair of the Crucifixion is not specific to the *Lamentacioun*, in that it often appears in one of the several opportunities for lament in the other texts, it is rarely treated with such rhetorical precision. This structurally very tidy and thorough annihilation of the angelic salutation also neatly connects this last lament to the first, in which she complains more generally to Gabriel about the apparent falsity of the terms of his greeting.

In content, in many ways, and in the modes of complaint employed, the *Lamentacioun* is very much of its genre. The loss and despair verbalized in this text are not vastly different to that found in other texts. It maintains meticulously, however, its careful recording of the Virgin's feelings, rather than describing the physical state of Christ, as it is found in parts of the Towneley *Crucifixion* lament, or, for example, in the 'Quis dabit' deposition lament, where the narrative moves into a Eucharistic treatment of Christ's blood. The *Lamentacioun*'s primary concern is with the motherhood of Mary and, by the end, her complete loss of self in the loss of her son. Mary's whole reason for being, and her reason for being given a voice at all in these texts, lies in her capacity as Mother of God. To an extent, the laments record the process of the destruction of her selfhood, to the point at which she wishes herself dead. Essentially, in her attack on Gabriel's defining statements

⁴⁵ *Complaint*, p. 112.

⁴⁶ See *Lamentacioun*, lines 267–76; for a discussion of antithetical structure in the *Lamentacioun*, see George R. Keiser, 'The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos', in *Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 167–93.

about her at the Annunciation — the moment at which she becomes real and necessary in the Gospels — she writes herself out of existence also. The *Lamentacioun* is an exercise in bearing witness to the symbolic passion of the Mother of God alongside that of her son. Her utter emotional destruction mirrors her son’s physical torture, to the extent that she and he suffer both explicitly and symbolically for and with each other. Although the focus of the *Lamentacioun* remains at all times with the Virgin, her experiences reflect enough of her son’s pain for the well-worn narrative outline of the Passion to frame the Virgin Mary’s emotional suffering. Mourning, Spargo argues, is a process by which the importance of the dead person is protected in the world that remains behind.⁴⁷ Passion devotion is an exercise in memorializing the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of mankind. The *Lamentacioun of Oure Lady*, within this framework of the atonement, bears witness to the Blessed Virgin’s sacrifice for the love of her son.

⁴⁷ Spargo, *Ethics of Mourning*, p. 6.

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN'S LIFE IN LAMENT: LOVE, DEATH, AND POLITICS

Nadia Margolis

Je ne sçay comment je dure ;
Car mon dolent cuer fent d'yre,
Et plaindre n'oze, ne dire
Ma doulereuse aventure,

Ma dolente vie obscure,
Riens, fors la mort, ne desire ;
Je ne sçay comment je dure.

Et me fault par couverture
Chanter quant mon cuer souspire,
Et faire semblant de rire ;
Mais Dieux scet ce que j'endure ;
Je ne sçay comment je dure.

[I know not how I go on;
For my suffering heart bursts with grief.
And I dare not complain, nor tell
Of my painful event:

My sorrowful, obscure life,
Desires nothing, save for death,
I know not how I go on.

And I must, as if under cover,
Sing while my heart sighs,
And pretend to laugh;
But God knows what I endure;
I know not how I go on.]

*Rondeaux, 7.*¹

Just as grief is a signal facet of Christine's authorial persona, so lament becomes a primary mode of expression in both her poetry and prose. The above rondeau, though belonging to her early corpus devoted to love's suffering, could

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¹ All lyrics cited from *Œuvres Poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. by Maurice Roy, SATF, 3 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886–96; repr. New York: Johnson, 1965), unless otherwise noted. This rondeau is from I, 151, spelling slightly modified.

apply to any of her life's misfortunes, whether personal or political, commencing with the deaths of her father, Thomas de Pizan, and husband, Etienne de Castel, in close succession, leaving her, a mother of three in her mid-twenties, in dire financial hardship. Laments occur first in her lyric poetry and later in her political writings, as she gradually views her unfortunate situation to be microcosmic of a larger one: not merely her admittedly grave troubles, not only women's misfortunes in love affairs and other aspects of life in general, but those of her entire adoptive country, France, in its struggle to survive during the Hundred Years War — extending finally to the universal human condition throughout history, as she illustrates in her *Mutacion de Fortune* (1403). She also authored two *complaintes* titled as such, which differ from her laments in that they are highly stylized and concern unhappy love affairs exclusively, as does her more daring rewriting of the old *pastourelle* (pastoral lyric) from a grieving feminine point of view, the *Dit de la pastoure* ('Shepherdess's Tale'; 1403).²

All readers of Christine's work are familiar with her cultivation of her persona of solitary, grieving widow. So, to answer her rondeau's refrain, how *did* she go on? Such scholars as Liliane Dulac and Kevin Brownlee, albeit independently, have shown how widowhood proved less an obstacle than a necessary 'qualifying' stage, one actually freeing Christine to achieve what she would not have had her husband lived on, or had she found a new lover/husband as did the tragic Dido.³

Here, I will demonstrate how circumstances forced Christine to extend her sphere of bereavement from that of widow or forsaken lover in her first lyrics, to

² The 'Complaintes amoureuses' are in *Œuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Roy, I, 281–95; the *Dit de la pastoure* in II, 223–94. On the latter, see Christopher Callahan, 'Christine de Pizan's *Dit de la pastoure*: Pastoral Poetry and the Poetics of Loss', *Le Moyen Français*, 59 (2006), 23–34. For an overview of the theme of love's suffering in Christine's lyrics, see Jean-François Kosta-Théfaïne, *Le Chant de la douleur dans les poésies de Christine de Pizan* (Nantes: Petit Véhicule, 2007).

³ Liliane Dulac, 'Les Ouvertures closes dans *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* de Christine de Pizan: Le topos du "veuvage qualifiant"', in *Vers un "Thesaurus informatisé": topique des ouvertures narratives avant 1800. Actes du 4^e Colloque international SATOR, Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III, 25–27 octobre 1990*, ed. by Pierre Rodriguez and Michèle Weil (Montpellier: Centre d'étude du 18^e siècle de Montpellier, 1991), pp. 35–45; Kevin Brownlee, 'Widowhood, Sexuality, and Gender in Christine de Pizan', *Romanic Review*, 86 (1995), 339–53. Most recently, Barbara Stevenson further develops Brownlee's observations, linking widowhood to the sexual liberation — celibacy — necessary to her becoming learned, in 'Revisioning the Widow Christine de Pizan', in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. by Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 29–44.

the realm of maternal loss on both personal and public levels, via a series of different genres: devotional orison, allegorized psalms, political laments in epistolary or quasi-epistolary form, and finally, an epistle prefacing her own meditative book of hours. In her later works engaging maternal grief, Christine first wrote to console mothers of sons lost at Agincourt, and then, most likely because of her own son's death, she sympathizes with Mary mourning Christ on the Cross and then, arguably still farther, with Christ's own suffering as 'mother' of humanity.

Important precursors to the present study are Louise D'Arcens, who has explored Christine's widow-to-*mater dolorosa* transition from a literary versus political authority perspective, and Earl Jeffrey Richards, who has examined similar themes from the standpoint of kingship/regency theory and law.⁴ While incorporating such insights, this essay will focus more on the personal versus public tension in Christine's literary persona. I shall first consider post-Agincourt (and other broad-spectrum tragedies) bereavement, specifically that of mothers, as a socio-historical construct during Christine's career. Secondly, I shall then attempt to trace her reaction to these events as a professional poet, both secular and religious, and as a polemicist, moralist, and historian, in refining her art of lament. Thirdly, I shall link this evolution to a narrower concentration on the theme of maternal mourning for lost children, as both spiritual metaphor and personal event within the poet's œuvre.

In attempting to pinpoint the inspiration for her laments, we note that three major tragedies dominated Christine's adult life: her husband's death of plague at Beauvais in c. 1389; the civil war raging from late in 1407 through 1418; and the disastrous French loss to the English at Agincourt in 1415. Each event succeeded the other in an expanding sphere of influence. The death of her husband — the love of her life, thus justifying the intermingling of widow's and lover's personae marking her first ballades — is her most personal, microcosmic loss. The civil war, triggered in 1407 by the assassination of Louis, duke of Orléans, as ordered by John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy, raged on through that same faction's slaughter of the Armagnacs in Paris in 1418, causing the Dauphin and his court (including

⁴ Louise D'Arcens, 'Petit estat vesval: Christine de Pizan's Grieving Body Politic', in *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Karen Green and Constant J. Mews, Disputatio, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 201–26; Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Political Thought as Improvisation: Female Regency and Mariology in Late Medieval French Thought', in *Virtue, Liberty, and Toleration: Political Ideas of European Women, 1400–1800*, ed. by Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, New Synthese Historical Library (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 1–22. My thanks to Liliane Dulac for pointing me to and providing me with a copy of the latter.

Christine's son) to flee the capital; it thus affected her family and her country. The defeat at Agincourt, although imposing minimal territorial loss as such, would result in the far graver dynastic dissolution inflicted by the Treaty of Troyes (1420), disinheriting the future Charles VII in favour of Henry V of England and his heirs as kings of France, and therefore led to the widest-ranging consequences.

Together with these events' already amply investigated political-historical significance, a look at some new approaches to studying the impact of unprecedentedly high death rates on the public psyche in modern-era wars may enrich our perspective in re-creating how Christine and her contemporaries absorbed such losses emotionally.⁵ This entails looking beyond the familiar *danse macabre* and similarly stoical motifs of the medieval cult of death inspired by the Black Death during its various recurrences during the fourteenth century and possible other epidemics. (Christine qualifies the one that took her husband merely as 'une hastive epidimie' (a fast-acting epidemic).⁶) After civil war's ensuing 'honteuse effusion de sang' (shameful effusion of blood),⁷ how horrible was Agincourt's aftermath for the mothers, widows, and other female relatives of the some seven to ten thousand French dead, among them half of the French nobility — especially in light of the English losses at only a few hundred? Augmenting the shock of this bereavement was the humiliating fact that, even according to the most conservative of modern assessments, the French army outnumbered the English by three to two, while contemporary pro-English chroniclers like Jean de Wavrin set the ratio at six to one, probably to fuel the larger myth, affirmed by the 'miracle of St Crispin's

⁵ Here I have particularly in mind Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), but see also Mark E. Neely, Jr, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), and Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). For Faust's book, see reviews by Geoffrey C. Ward, *New York Times Book Review*, 27 January 2008, pp. 1, 8; Edward L. Ayers, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 January 2008, pp. B7–B10; see especially the review of all three by Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*, 21 January 2008, pp. 76–81; for a similar approach to World War I, see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ All citations from Christine's literary autobiography draw upon *Le Livre de l'advison Cristine*, ed. by Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac, *Études christiniennes*, 4 (Paris: Champion, 2001), here p. 100.

⁷ Christine's *Epistre a la Reine*, ed. by Angus J. Kennedy in his 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre a la reine* 1405', in *Christine de Pizan*, special issue, *Revue des langues romanes*, 92 (1988), 253–64 (p. 255).

Day', that England was divinely favoured to rule France.⁸ That is, it is tragic enough for a mother to lose her son in battle, even if his side triumphs, but to learn as well that his side was defeated so decisively is only more painful, for the nobility as much as the lower classes in this case. Plus, the nobles were more likely to read of their family members' deaths, graphically recounted, as was the French civil war killing, in contemporary chronicles.⁹ Such information would intensify, and in some cases may also have been enhanced by, Christine's own heartbreaking tableau of wartime carnage, for example, in this phrase from her lament against the civil war:¹⁰

La noble chevalerie et jouvente françoise [...] ore assemblee en honteuse bataille l'un contre l'autre, pere contre filz, frere contre frere, parens contre autres, a glaives mortelz, couvrans de sang, de corps mors et de membres les très douloureux champs.¹¹

[Noble French knighthood and youth [...] now assembled in shameful battle, one against the other, father against son, brother against brother, families against each other, with deadly swords, covering the groaning fields with blood, dead bodies, and body parts.]

And let us not forget the more routine, peacetime, but no less wrenching losses: childhood mortality rates, including Christine's younger son. We learn this from

⁸ For these statistics and their varied reportage among contemporary chroniclers, see Anne Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 12–13. For a new evaluation of Agincourt statistics, see Anne Curry, *Agincourt: A New History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), who argues, via primary-source data, that the French to English ratio was more likely 3:2 than the legendary 6:1. Juliet Barker, however, in *Agincourt: The King, the Campaign, the Battle* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), giving greater credence to Wavrin's chronicle, holds the ratio to be somewhere between 4:1 and 6:1; see <<http://www.revivalclothing.com/article-penagincourt.aspx> [accessed 17 April 2010].

⁹ See Curry, *Battle of Agincourt*, passim but esp. pp. 164–74 for French chronicles (Monstrelet, Le Fèvre, and Wavrin) on the Agincourt dead, noting a large proportion of the nobility among them.

¹⁰ For rhetorical resemblances among Christine and her contemporaries concerning the social, political, and familial dismemberment wrought by civil war, see Carla Bozzolo, 'Familles éclatées, amis dispersés: échos des guerres civiles dans les écrits de Christine de Pizan et de ses contemporains', in *Contexts and Continuities: Proceedings of the 14th International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan* (Glasgow 21–27 July 2000), *Published in Honour of Liliane Dulac*, ed. by Angus J. Kennedy and others, 3 vols (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 2000), I, 115–28.

¹¹ Quoted from 'La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France de Christine de Pizan', ed. by Angus J. Kennedy, in *Mélanges de langue et littérature françaises du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance offerts à Charles Foulon*, 2 vols (Rennes: Institut de français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980), I, 177–85 (p. 180).

her reference to elder son Jean's existence thus: 'comme Mort le m'eust seul filz laissié' (since Death had left me him as my only son).¹²

In the case of an author like Christine, such considerations provide more than the usual background information necessary to reading an *engagé* writer. I have devoted this much space to historical and personal context because Christine had, from her earliest writings, subsumed her identity and personal feelings not just within those of her family, friends, and milieu, but with France's political fortunes, then eventually with the course of human history. It is therefore not exaggerating to contend that during most of her career, her energetic personal body and mind, generating prodigious amounts of poetry and prose, functioned as a body rhetoric, to suffer with and help remedy the fate of France's ailing body politic, from the mad King Charles VI on down.

Despite the trauma of many private and public losses, Christine exercised her poetic skills throughout her career to transform herself from Fortune's victim into not merely a self-sufficient person but also a political activist in the service of her country. A hallmark of her poetics of lament involves her creative incorporation of political rhetoric and affective piety, as previously studied by Eric Hicks, Gérard Gros, Liliane Dulac, Maureen Boulton, and me.¹³ To begin our initial analysis of

¹² *Livre de l'advison*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 113. Historians seem to agree that while children suffered high death rates in medieval Europe — estimating childhood mortality at about 30 to 50 per cent in England, for example — establishing precise and reliable figures for infant mortality during Christine's time is extremely difficult. See Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Melissa Snell, 'The Medieval Child, Part 3: Surviving Infancy. Childhood, Childbirth, and Adolescence in the Middle Ages', About.com, <<http://historymedren.about.com/library/weekly/aa112200c.htm>> [accessed 17 April 2010]. See also Kenneth Hill, 'The Decline in Childhood Mortality', in *The State of Humanity*, ed. by Julian L. Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 37–50, which affirms that 20 per cent of children died before the age of one in developed countries during this time. Hanawalt asserts that such frequent infant deaths scarcely inured medieval mothers to their loss, at least not in London, attesting their immense grief and even insanity at losing a child (*Growing Up in Medieval London*, p. 61). Christine also had a surviving daughter, Marie, who had taken vows at Poissy abbey while still a young woman, perhaps to ease her mother's burden after Etienne de Castel's death.

¹³ Eric Hicks, 'Une femme dans le monde: Christine de Pizan et l'écriture de la politique', in *L'Hostellerie de pensée: études sur l'art littéraire au Moyen Âge offertes à Daniel Poirion par ses anciens élèves*, ed. by Michel Zink and others, *Cultures et civilisations médiévales*, 12 (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995), pp. 233–43; Gérard Gros, "Mon oroison entens ...": étude sur les trois opuscules pieux de Christine de Pizan', *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 8 (1990), 99–120; Liliane Dulac, 'Littérature et dévotion: à propos des *Heures de contemplacion sur la Passion de Nostre*

Christine's evolving art of lament, we shall start with some of her earliest poems, as grouped within the *Cent Ballades*, *Autres Ballades*, *Rondeaux*, *Virelais*, and other collections (c. 1394–1404). In these collections constituting her lyric-poetic apprenticeship, Christine was also honing her polemical skills as well. That is, she soon learned to apply her reworkings (*remaniements*) of tired courtly-love convention not only to inject and revitalize it with a feminine perspective, but also to deploy the refined yet powerful expressive arsenal of love poetry in the service of political advocacy. As a result, though most of her readers tend to associate these lyric poems with emotional snapshots of her phases of mourning her husband's death, interspersed with evocations of love lost, unrequited, or betrayed in both male and female voices, we also find such civic-minded laments as *Autres Ballades*, 42, on the death of Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy (1404), whose opening verses are reproduced below:

Plourez, Francoys! Tous, d'un commun vouloir,
 Grans et petis, plourez ceste grant perte!
 Plourez, bon Roy! — bien vous devez douloir —
 Plourez devez vostre grevance apperte;
 Plourez la mort de cil qui par desserte
 Amer deviez et par droit de lignage,
 Vostre loyal, noble oncle, le très sage.¹⁴

[Weep, French people! All for one common purpose,
 People great and small, weep for this great loss!
 Weep, good King! — well you might grieve —
 Weep you must, in your sorrow openly;
 Weep for the death of him whom deservedly

Seigneur de Christine de Pizan, in *Miscellanea Medievalia: mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. by Jean-Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé, and Daniel Quéruel, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 1998), I, 475–84; Maureen Boulton, “Nous deffens de feu, ... de pestilence, de guerres”: Christine de Pizan's Religious Works’, in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. by Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady, Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 215–28. These postdate my own ‘La Progression polémique, spirituelle, et personnelle dans les écrits religieux de Christine de Pizan’, in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Âge: études autour de Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Liliane Dulac and Bernard Ribémont, *Medievalia, Études christiniennes*, 16 (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995), pp. 297–316.

¹⁴ Cited from *Christine de Pisan: Ballades, Rondeaux, and Virelais*, ed. by Kenneth Varty (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1965), pp. 120–21, because his text is based on the most authoritative manuscript, London, British Library, MS Harley 4431, compared to Roy's reliance on the Parisian manuscripts exclusively (*Œuvres Poétiques*, I, 256–57). However, Varty's edition contains only selected poems. See also his notes to this poem and to *Rondeaux*, 7 (pp. 163–64, 146).

You should love, and by right of lineage,
Your loyal, noble uncle, most wise.]

In rhetorically (and no doubt personally) mourning her onetime patron's death (Philip was also the brother of her family's onetime protector, King Charles V, who had predeceased Philip by twenty-four years), Christine's stanzas — here weeping in more stately fashion through weightier decasyllables rather than the usual lyric octo — move up and down the French social hierarchy, beginning with Philip's nephew, the mentally unstable Charles VI, and down to the *peuple commun*, then horizontally across the powerful duke's many domains. Christine's awareness of hierarchy and topography (both moral and literal) pervades many of her political and didactic works as she aims her appeal to all classes of men and/or women on various topics. Rhetorically speaking, her use of anaphora and other devices in this ballade proved so striking that this poem would later be plagiarized in a far less reverent vein, after Philip's son John ordered the assassination of Duke Louis of Orléans (another of Christine's patrons) in 1407 — a crucial event for the future stability of France's body politic, perhaps even more than Philip's death. If she could not have been entirely flattered by the opposite faction's shameless appropriation of her work, this must have at least caused her to realize her poetry's grip on officialdom at this point in her career.¹⁵

Also at this time, in 1405, she composed the *Epistre a la reine*, deploring France's civil strife, as fomented between the dukes of Orléans and Burgundy, and pleading with Queen Isabeau of France to act as 'moyennerresse' (intermedia-trix) and intervene as 'pouchacerresse' (pursuer-ess) of peace within the kingdom, using gendered endings — a device more typical of lyric poetry — here as part of her total message: that women of power need not merely sit and weep, but actually effect a remedy. This too was becoming an identifying attribute of Christine's style. Her astonishing letter contains one of the most heart-rending metaphors for describing France's privation, through political dismemberment, as mirrored by the suffering maternal body yearning to nourish its victims:

Helas doncques qui seroit si dure mere qui peust souffrir, se elle n'avoit le cuer de pierre, veoir ses enfans entre occire et espendre le sang l'un à l'autre et leurs povres membres destruire et disperser, et puis, qu'il venist par de costé estrangers aucuns qui du tout les persecutassent et saïssissent leurs heritaiges? [...] Et que les pauvres petiz alaittans et enfans

¹⁵ See Nadia Margolis, 'The Poem's Progress: Christine's *Autres Balades* no. 42 and the Fortunes of a Text', in *Christine de Pizan 2000: Studies on Christine de Pizan in Honour of Angus J. Kennedy*, ed. by John Campbell and Nadia Margolis, Faux Titre, 196 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 251–62.

criassent apres leurs lasses de mères vesves et adoulues, mourans de faim et elles, desnüées de leurs biens, n'eussent de quoi les apaisier.¹⁶

[Alas, then, who would be such a harsh mother, except someone with a heart of stone, who could suffer to see her children killing each other and spilling each other's blood and destroying and dispersing their poor bodily members and then, that some come from foreign lands to persecute them and seize their inheritances? [...] And that poor little sucklings and children should cry for their tired, widowed, and grieving mothers, dying of hunger, stripped of all their possessions, who have nothing left to appease them.]

However, she had cultivated compassion for maternal suffering well before this, since, as Bernard Ribémont has elucidated, mothers constitute important figures in Christine's writing, despite her near silence concerning her own mother. Christine's mothers attain less prominence in her didactic writings than in her political works in that she does not teach future mothers to be militant because Christine's concept of the ideal mother is more than a political anchor; she is a moral one as well.¹⁷ But queens have special responsibilities as mothers and as rulers. In her epistle, Christine inscribes Queen Isabeau among other paragons of heroic maternity such as Blanche of Castile (mother of St Louis) and even Mary herself.¹⁸ Christine would repeat and develop the maternal body-politic image in her *Lamentacion* while also extending the ability to affect civic affairs to women of all classes, as we shall see later.

Some preliminary examination of her religious poetry is also necessary at this juncture, since, although she composed more religious works towards the end of her career, her devotional writing actually began, perhaps somewhat unusually, quite early in her career. Because these early devotional poems are concomitant to her more abundant secular works, we may read them as a facet of her evolving art of lament instead of just the usual late-career concern for mortality and self-redemption. *Une oraison Nostre Dame* (1402–03) interests us especially because of its emphasis on maternal compassion and sorrow. In this stanzaic verse prayer — the orison form being rhetorically more liberated than conventional prayer — part of a unique triad of them within her œuvre, she has borrowed the incipit of a common Latin prayer for the poem's refrain, repeated after each of its eighteen stanzas. Thus, official liturgical language intrudes upon Christine's already distinctive mix

¹⁶ 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre a la reine*', ed. by Kennedy, pp. 256–57.

¹⁷ Bernard Ribémont, 'Christine de Pizan et la figure de la mère', in *Christine de Pizan 2000*, ed. by Campbell and Margolis, pp. 149–62. Ribémont (p. 155) also notes how the woman's role is largely absent from Christine's vision of the body politic in the *Livre du Corps de policie* of 1407.

¹⁸ 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre a la reine*', ed. by Kennedy, p. 256.

of political complaint and personal lament.¹⁹ She applies this rhetorical combination here with the same attention to political hierarchy that we have observed in *Autres Ballades*, 42, only with more extended dimensions: she begins now with the Church, then gradually works down through the nobility, knights, clergy, bourgeoisie, and common people; a prayer for the dead (especially Charles V) and, finally, pious women, 'le devout sexe des femmes' (the pious sex of women) (v. 199), ending with a plea for herself and her friends.²⁰ Written in the first person singular, and addressing Mary as *tu*, its final stanza, however, replaces the *je/me* with *nous* as final beneficiaries of Mary's intervention. Each stanza formulaically begins with an apostrophe to Mary via a different yet familiar epithet for the Virgin, ranging from 'O Vierge pure, incomparable' (v. 1) to such others as 'Roïne qui des maux nous lève' (Queen who delivers us from evil) (v. 73), 'Fontaine pleine de pitié' (Fountain full of pity) (v. 133), and 'O engenderesse de vie' (O Engendress of life) (v. 157). There then follows, in keeping with standard orison form, a reference to one of the Church Fathers or similarly renowned Christian authority (Jerome, Anselm, Bernard) by name, and then the social category requiring divine aid.²¹ Most pertinent to our interest is the first half of that final stanza for herself and friends, coming after the prayer for the earthly and celestial protection of women, since it is here that Christine re-creates the Virgin's experience of her son's death on the Cross:

Vierge pure, par les fontaines	[Virgin pure, through the fountains
De tes chastes yeulz et les peines	Of your chaste eyes you see the pain
Qu'a ton filz veïs en la croix,	Of your son on the Cross —
Dist saint Amsiaume, et les vaines	So says Saint Anselme — and the open veins
De son corps qui pendait en aines	Of His body, hanging from it, unrelieved;
Ouvertes, te pri qu'os ma voix	I beg of you, listen to my voice
Et a ton filz, qui fut mort mis	And to your son, who was put to death
Pour moy et pour tous mes amis. ²²	For me and all my friends.]

The poet's depiction of Mary as bereaved mother, expressed via graphic imagery, would find more extensive development, and personalization, after twenty years of treating other subjects.

¹⁹ The two other poems in the devotional triad from this phase are the *Quinze joyes Nostre Dame* and *Oroyson Nostre Seigneur*. For more details on Christine's use of liturgical language in her religious works, see Boulton, "Nous deffens de feu", esp. pp. 218–19 for the *Oraison Nostre Dame*.

²⁰ *Oraison Nostre Dame*, in *Œuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Roy, III, 1–9.

²¹ For more details on the rhetorical rules for orisons and Christine, see Gros, "Mon oraison entens ...", p. 102 and passim.

²² *Oraison Nostre Dame* in *Œuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Roy, III, 9.

These same elements from the *Oraison* reappear in the far more complex format of the *Sept Psaumes allegorisés*, Christine's first prose devotional work, composed for Charles III le Noble, king of Navarre (1409–10), although this acknowledgement lies hidden until near the end, perhaps to enlarge the work's audience, including, once again, 'le devout sexe des femmes'.²³ Christine effaces herself even more so, perhaps to add further humble austerity to her penitential persona before an important patron. Although there is nothing new in paraphrasing and writing meditations on the Penitential Psalms (her revered Dante and Petrarch also composed them), laced with scenes from the Life of Christ, the Litany of the Saints, and other standard devotional components often heptameral in form, one agrees with Maureen Boulton's assertion that 'Christine's innovation was to turn a review of the basic elements of religion into an impetus for a series of prayers that embraced the entire social structure of the French kingdom, even as it reflected on the humanity of God'.²⁴ Her reasons for doing this seem to lie in her belief that the French required a reinvigorated practice of penance and humility in order to surmount the terrible times at hand — as she did herself. On a higher plane, the suffering maternal figure emphasized here is the Church, rent by schism amongst her wayward children, the plural popes.

Christine wrote the *Sept Psaumes* contemporaneously to her return to the love ballade sequence for the first time in about a decade in the *Cent ballades d'amant et de dame* (1407–10), thus attesting to her polymathic prosodic experimentation in secular courtly as well as religious-political works. Moreover, it is significant that these *Cent ballades* convey greater sadness, particularly as the sequence closes with the lady's 'Lay mortel', in which we perceive at work the same increasingly sober thoughts motivating her political prayers and laments — even before Agincourt, the Armagnac massacre, and Jean Castel's death.

At this same time too, Christine returns to her secular, *engagée* arena to address her prose political lament mainly to the Duke of Berry, the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France* (or ... *maux de la guerre civile*) (1410), as she continues to press for an end to this conflict. She is by now rather disappointed with the Queen's failure to act as true *moyennerresse* (and similar feminized epithets from the *Epistre a la reine*), as prescribed not just in her aforementioned letter but also in the earlier

²³ All citations from this work taken from *Les Sept psaumes allegorisés* of Christine de Pisan, ed. by Ruth Ringland Rains (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), p. 142.

²⁴ See Boulton, "Nous deffens de feu", p. 221.

Livre des Trois Vertus (1404), since matters have only worsened.²⁵ Presenting herself as ‘seulette a part’ (lonely little woman on the margins), her eyes ‘fountains of tears’ (as we have seen Mary’s in the *Oraison*), Christine also calls upon Queen Isabeau once more in a central passage, this time as ‘mother of the French noble heirs’, but in less exalted terms than in her *Epistre a la reine* of five years earlier, using the familiar *tu* with the Queen and the Duke instead of *vous*. Yet this appears to derive from a sense of urgency, necessitating a more oral, less formal, even communal, style, rather than diminished respect. She also plays on the Queen’s maternal role versus the standard body-politic image when she locates the civil war in the ‘nombriil’ (navel) of France when she could have used ‘coeur’ (heart) to the same geographic advantage, were that her sole interest.²⁶

Throughout this lament, her frequent and continuous references to tears render the effusion aggressive rather than traditionally passive, as she strives to move her aristocratic readers towards more effective action, especially her female ones so prone to feeling helpless because of their femininity, as noted by several critics.²⁷ In characteristic fashion, Christine transforms conventionally mandated weakness into a source of strength for women, and not merely the aristocratic ones. Just prior to addressing the Queen, she appeals to all ‘ladies, damsels, and women of France’ to deploy their own tears — their gendered weaponry — with equal force, recalling

²⁵ D’Arcens, ‘*Petit estat vesval*’, p. 209; for the *Trois Vertus*’s advice to princesses as peacemakers, see p. 208; for the queen’s intercessionary powers in Christine’s *Corps de policie* and *Epistre*, see pp. 210–11. For a positive reassessment of Queen Isabeau’s actual efforts to bring peace and its relation to the *Lamentacion*, see Tracy Adams, ‘*Moyennerresse de traictié de Paix*: Christine de Pizan’s Mediators’, in *Healing the Body Politic*, ed. by Green and Mews, pp. 177–200.

²⁶ This has also been observed by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski in the notes to her translation, with Kevin Brownlee, of the *Lamentacion*, in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. and trans. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, with Kevin Brownlee, Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 225.

²⁷ See the following essays in *Politics, Gender, & Genre: The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Margaret Brabant (Boulder: Westview, 1992): Linda Leppig, ‘The Political Rhetoric of Christine de Pizan: *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*’, pp. 141–56; Mary McKinley, ‘The Subversive “Seulette”’, pp. 157–69; and Margarete Zimmermann, ‘Vox Femina, Vox Politica: The *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*’, pp. 113–27. This is further developed by association with the Virgin’s tears in D’Arcens, ‘*Petit estat vesval*’, pp. 215–16.

their use by Argia, widow of Polynices, and the Sabine women,²⁸ to avert the danger of the ominous split between Armagnacs and Burgundians:

Plourez doncques, plourez, batant les paulmes a grans criz [...]. Car jà sont aguisez les glaives qui vous rendront veufves et desnüées d'enfans et de parens!²⁹

[Cry out then, cry out, clapping your hands noisily [...]. For the swords that will make you widows and bereft of children and other relatives are already sharpened!]

Despite its aura of spontaneous emotion, then, the *Lamentacion* is artfully constructed and represents Christine's political lament at peak form. Seamlessly interweaving multiple voices, she weeps as a woman, a poet, and a public polemicist all at once. To supplement Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's synthesis somewhat, Christine's solitary, tearful persona does 'open the text'; then in the end, reduced to a *povre voix* crying in the wilderness that France has become, she 'closes it' in the final lines.³⁰

Two final texts in the evolution of her lament centre on the theme of maternal bereavement: the *Epistre de la Prison de vie humaine* and the *Heures de contemplacion sur la Passion de Nostre Seigneur*. Both texts reflect her dual persona as maternal consoler and maternal martyr through divine inspiration. V. A. Kolve's iconographical study compares the opening scene of Christine's *Cité des Dames* (1405) to that of the Annunciation of the Virgin as recounted in Luke. Louise D'Arcens further interprets this moment — in which Christine is awakened by a ray of light falling upon her lap just before the famous threesome (Reason, Rectitude, and

²⁸ Argia and the Sabines both exemplify Christine's recycling of her previous historical material for polemical purposes. On Argia, who was originally taken from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus claris*, as Christine acknowledged in her earlier *Cité des dames* (II. 17. 1), see Josette Wisman's notes to her edition of the *Lamentacion* in *The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life*, with *An Epistle to the Queen of France* and *Lament on the Evils of Civil War*, ed. and trans. by Josette A. Wisman, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 21A (New York: Garland, 1984), p. 87, and also Kennedy's note to his edition of the same work, *Lamentacion*, p. 181; for Argia in the *Cité des Dames*, see Earl Jeffrey Richards's annotated translation, *City of Ladies* (New York: Persea, 1982), pp. 125–26, 263; Christine mentions the Sabines in *Cité des dames*, II. 33. 1: in Richards's translation, pp. 147–50. She also alludes to Sabines in her earlier *Mutacion de Fortune*, vv. 18573–723: see *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune par Christine de Pisan*, ed. by Suzanne Solente, SATF, 4 vols (Paris: Picard, 1959–66), III, 182–87.

²⁹ *Lamentacion*, ed. by Kennedy, p. 181.

³⁰ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Christine de Pizan and the Political Life in Late Medieval France', in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. by Altmann and McGrady, pp. 9–24 (p. 18). See also Andrea Tarnowski, 'Le Geste prophétique chez Christine de Pizan', in *Apogée et déclin en Europe, 1200–1500*, ed. by Claude Thomasset and Michel Zink (Paris: Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), pp. 211–23 (pp. 218–20), also cited by Blumenfeld-Kosinski.

Justice) appear before her to help her construct her citadel — to furnish an indispensable link between Christine's self-image as reformer and that of herself as mother. Christine conveys this especially by having the light ray's path, commonly touching the Virgin's head in Annunciation depictions, shine instead upon her own lap: traditionally the seat of procreation and birth, and, per her own *Chemin de long estude* and *Advision*, the locus of receiving knowledge.³¹ This shift in locus may be explained by historical context. By around 1418, the above-noted events heralding France's political crumbling and loss of national identity, together with Christine's advancing age, may have caused her to abandon her characteristic rationalist determinism in favour of a deeper reliance on religious faith. Somewhat eerily, in retrospect, even as early as the end of her 1405 *Advision*, we find Lady Philosophy changing into Lady Theology as the prime source of Christine's consolation.³² Religious faith, as superior to human reason, certainly appears to inform her last known works: the *Epistre de la Prison de vie humaine* (1416–18) and the *Heures de Contemplacion de la Passion de Nostre Seigneur* (c. 1425–29).

Christine addresses the *Epistre de la Prison de vie humaine*, generically a letter of consolation, to Marie de Berry, daughter of the Duke addressed in the *Lamentacion*, duchess of Bourbon and Auvergne. As in the *Lamentacion*, Christine uses the familiar *tu* form; unlike the earlier work, she here takes pains to explain this as respectful 'following the style of poets and orators' (vv. 81–82). Its thirteen chapters are introduced by Christine as *remede* and *medecine* for Marie and other noble women suffering from 'la griefve maladie et enfermeté d'amertume de cuer et tristece de pensee' (the grievous malady and infirmity of a bitter heart and sad thoughts) (vv. 1–3) after Agincourt. It also enables Christine to repay the Duchess for her aid during the poet's financial hardship.³³ As evidenced by this prose letter's

³¹ V. A. Kolve, 'The Annunciation to Christine: Authorial Empowerment in The Book of the City of Ladies', in *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23–24 March 1990*, ed. by Brendan Cassidy (Princeton: Princeton University Dept. of Art and Archaeology, 1993), pp. 171–96; D'Arcens, 'Petit estat vesval', pp. 211–12, also thoroughly documents the Annunciation tradition and symbolism of the giron 'lap', and discusses its presence in the *Chemin* (*Le Chemin de longue étude*, ed. and trans. by Andrea Tarnowski, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2000), v. 1021), and *Livre de l'advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 92.

³² See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Two Responses to Agincourt: Alain Chartier's *Livre des quatre dames* and Christine de Pizan's *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*', in *Contexts and Continuities*, ed. by Kennedy and others, I, 75–85 (p. 81).

³³ All citations from this text are from *Christine de Pisan's Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, ed. by Angus J. Kennedy (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French Dept., 1984), which also serves as the basis for Anne Curry's translated excerpt in *Battle of Agincourt*, pp. 341–43, as a contem-

title, Christine's guiding theme is that human life is a prison in which we living mortals must suffer Fortune's cruelty, mourning our lost loved ones and enduring other miseries, while the dead, among them Marie de Berry's many relatives, including her son-in-law, have been freed and sent on to Paradise.³⁴

Repudiating the copious tears of her previous works and advising Marie to refrain from weeping as well (vv. 54–55), Christine cites abundantly from the Scriptures and classical authors alike to encourage Marie to remain patient and hopeful as she perseveres for several reasons: those who die in battle receive special honours; that God has sent three gifts — Grace, Nature, and Fortune — to aid in Marie's consolation. Also, as Christine reminds her through a series of strongly voiced rhetorical questions, Marie still retains her high social status and family, including her other children — 'D'autres beaux enfans assez n'as-tu, noble dame?' (Have you not enough other beautiful children, Noble Lady?) — to help her persevere, as proof that God has been kind to her, compared to what other women have lost (vv. 889–960).³⁵ Christine goes on to say that those who have died will be welcomed into Paradise and receive the triumphant crown of twelve stars (corresponding to the twelve joys in Heaven).³⁶ Finally, Christine advises Marie to give alms and say prayers to comfort others rather than shed tears, since the former will prove more beneficial all around. Anne Curry, a historian, rightly sees in this work a 'further example of the dislocation and soul-searching in France following the defeat at Agincourt'.³⁷ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski reads it as Christine's 'farewell' to the type of politically active texts we have just surveyed.³⁸ This is true to some extent, but within the confines of *consolatio*, the *Prison de vie humaine* is nevertheless a forceful text.

porary document of Agincourt's effect upon the French, along with Alain Chartier's poem, the *Livre des quatre dames*, which, like Christine's *Epistre*, omits mention of Agincourt by name. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Two Responses', documents scholarship on the consolation as genre from Plato and Seneca onward, also citing Jean Gerson's influence on Christine (pp. 77, 81).

³⁴ By contrast, Marie's own son, Charles d'Artois, was taken prisoner but did live on until 1472.

³⁵ *Prison de vie humaine*, ed. by Kennedy, p. 39, lines 916–17. Boulton, "Nous deffens de feu", p. 222, comments on the rhetorical shock value of these lines intended to 'shake Marie out of the lethargy of her sorrow'.

³⁶ For the source of this crown as the image of the Woman of the Apocalypse, see Angus J. Kennedy, 'Christine de Pizan's Crown of Twelve Stars', *Medium Ævum*, 77 (2008), 279–92. My thanks to Prof. Kennedy for advance access to this article, which builds upon Josette A. Wisman, 'The Resurrection according to Christine de Pizan', *Religion and the Arts*, 14 (2000), 337–58.

³⁷ Curry, *Battle*, p. 342.

³⁸ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Two Responses', pp. 80–81.

The *Heures de Contemplacion* merits our attention indirectly and briefly but no less significantly.³⁹ Certain facts of this work's creation guarantee its importance even before we probe its surface. I agree with Maureen Boulton that the *Heures* continue and respond to the *Prison de vie humaine*, given its similar purpose (as 'superlative medicine'), audience ('the entire feminine sex'), and rhetorical style, especially in its preface. It is one of the rare devotional treatises to have been composed by a lay person. In a work not dedicated to any one patron, the authorial 'I' — 'Christine, ayant pitié et compassion' (having pity and compassion) — addresses a female audience in its consoling epistolary preface in order to 'provoke patience', alleviate their suffering, and be generally 'prouffitable' (useful/worthwhile) — a longstanding, oft-repeated Christinian adjective, even in her affective-devotional mode — amidst France's ever worsening troubles. She then speaks less directly to the reader during most of the text until, after Christ has died before Mary's eyes, she returns to the 'dames contemplatives et entre vous le devot sexe des femmes' (contemplative ladies and from among you the pious sex of women) after addressing Mary, the Apostles, the Jews, and Christ, and then continues with the hours. Like all Passion narratives, hers is scheduled according to the canonical hours; yet instead of beginning at matins, as most do, Christine's *Heures* commences at compline, the last hour.⁴⁰ Amidst the many gruesomely detailed evocations of Christ's bodily suffering on the cross (recalling the *Oraison Notre Dame*), and Mary's pain while witnessing it — 'Et tu, tres douce Vierge honnoree, que devins tu quant tu veiz getter a ton doux enfant le desrain souspir?' (And you, honoured gentle Virgin, what happened to you when you saw your sweet child yielding forth his last breath?) (lines 1035–36) — all typical of many Passion narratives,⁴¹ Christine has added her own touches to the Gospels themselves,

³⁹ Since this work remains without a critical edition and its principal manuscripts are barely legible, I am tremendously grateful to Liliane Dulac for having generously provided me with a copy of the edition she and René Stuijp are preparing.

⁴⁰ See the more complete analyses by Liliane Dulac, 'Littérature et dévotion'; Maureen Boulton, 'Christine's *Heures de contemplacion de la Passion* in the Context of Late-Medieval Passion Devotion', in *Contexts and Continuities*, ed. by Kennedy and others, I, 99–113, esp. p. 102; D'Arcens, '*Petit estat vesval*', pp. 222–26. Boulton, 'Christine's *Heures*', p. 102, also notes that Christine's authorship was suppressed in one copy of the *Heures*. Dulac, Stuijp, and Lori Walters have uncovered a strikingly similar Passion by Christine's friend and mentor, Jean Gerson, which he may even have written for her, addressed as 'sister'.

⁴¹ See Liliane Dulac, 'À propos des représentations du corps souffrant chez Christine de Pizan', in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature françaises du Moyen Âge offerts à Pierre Demarolle*, ed. by Charles Brucker (Paris: Champion, 1998), pp. 313–24.

among them the intriguing element of Mary's foreknowledge that her son would be resurrected, which she announces to the apostles after His burial towards the end, as both 'prophet and preacher', as Françoise Autrand interprets it.⁴² If she did actually write this contemplation of the Passion to mourn her son Jean de Castel's death (1425),⁴³ we should read its purpose not so much as equating her son with Christ, nor herself with Mary, as sanctifying and universalizing the overwhelming pain of untimely maternal bereavement.

As the Passion narrative progresses, Christine goes beyond sympathizing with Mary, indeed immersing herself in her grief, to shifting her narrator's gaze upward so as to suffer with Christ's 'marvellous' pain, exhorting us readers to attempt the same, experiencing His pity for His mother's sorrow whereupon her gaze returns downward from His level on the cross. Despite her late-career religious frame of mind, Christine has not entirely quit Lady Reason's court, as evidenced by her glosses on the Passion's various phases, although she has refrained from revisiting the onomastic association 'Christ-Christine', contained more appropriately in her *Mutacion de Fortune* (vv. 374–78), having developed more subtle ways to express her profound compassion with Him in the *Heures* and take comfort in His resurrection, as her narrative closes.⁴⁴

Fortunately, she would have the chance to compose the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* ('Tale of Joan of Arc'; 1429), after 'weeping eleven years in a closed abbey', as she herself rejoices in the opening verses, before her own mortal exit. In penning the first non-anonymous work in French to commemorate the victorious young warrior maiden sworn to save France, Christine finds cause to celebrate, rather than lament: she returns more positively to the use of rational proof combined with quasi-mystical faith to help exorcise France's demons and, by promoting Joan as its true saviour, give birth one last time.

⁴² Email message of 9 December 2007 from Françoise Autrand to Liliane Dulac concerning Christine's and Gerson's *Passions* and Christine's making Mary into a *prophète et prédicateur*. My profound thanks to Prof. Dulac for sharing this most insightful message with me. Most currently, see also Autrand's commentary on the *Heures* in her *Christine de Pizan: une femme en politique* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), pp. 426–30.

⁴³ This hypothesis was suggested by Charity Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), pp. 202–03.

⁴⁴ On this aspect, see Margolis, 'Progression polémique', pp. 307, 314.

SPINNING WOMEN AND MANLY SOLDIERS: GRIEF AND GAME IN THE ENGLISH MASSACRE PLAYS

Jane Tolmie

The subject of the Massacre of the Innocents by the soldiers of Herod survives in five late Middle English plays (Chester, Towneley, York, Digby, and N-Town), which integrate discourses of game, play and gender-bending into horrific violence. Grieving and lamenting mothers are juxtaposed with laughing soldiers. Abrupt shifts in tone become an aesthetic strategy whereby grief over the loss of children is highlighted against a backdrop of violence and sexual — and scatological — joking. This aesthetic strategy also highlights a number of issues to do with gender performance. It raises questions about the staging of scenes of violence and maternal pain in an all-male cross-dressed theatre, and it draws audience attention to the notion of making sex in performance. Sue-Ellen Case argues that the conventions of encoding female gender in a transvestite theatre should 'be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing actual women and replacing them with the masks of patriarchal production'.¹ Case explores the idea that female parts and aspects are actually made up in performance. While Case's work deals with classical Greek theatre, it has relevance elsewhere as well. Consider, for example, this scene in the Chester play of the *Slaughter of the Innocents* in which a mother attempts to deflect a soldier's murderous intent from her son by creating a daughter on the spot (lines 361–68):

SECUNDUS MILES: Dame, shewe thou me thy child there;
hee must hopp uppon my speare.
And hit any pintell beare,
I must teach him a playe.

¹ Sue-Ellen Case, 'Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts', *Theatre Journal*, 37 (1985), 317–27 (p. 318).

SECUNDA MULIER: Naye, freake, thou shalt fayle;
 my child shall thou not assayle.
 Hit hath two hooles under the tayle;
 kysse and thou may assaye.²

Here the Secunda Mulier deliberately draws attention to the manufacture of sexual parts in performance: from stage-prop doll to boy to girl and back again. The premises of a transvestite theatre are openly acknowledged and addressed. Identities are made up with words and artifice, and easily destroyed again, just as easily as the children in this play are destroyed. What are the functions of this superimposition of discourses, child's play — gender play — ass-kissing (literally, as the mother invites the soldier to kiss her child's two holes) — infanticide? What is the status, or even the tone, of that resisting maternal voice in the Chester play? How are grieving mothers represented and permitted to articulate their experiences of loss, pain, and resistance more generally in the Middle English massacre plays? How do the plays function as 'cultural memory', which Jan Assman defines as 'memory sites in which the memory of entire national or religious communities is concentrated'?³

Grief, like anger — and the massacre plays are angry, too, dependent as they are on the vilification and rejection of Herod and his men — is not contained or solved by art. Quite the contrary. It is preserved and passed on to the reader or audience for specific purposes, didactic, affective, and memorializing. This process of dissemination reproduces and inevitably transforms the foundational event, the putative source of lament and grief. The point of origin becomes at once timeless and newly time-specific.⁴ Recent work in visual and trauma studies offers useful insights here. In the introduction to an essay collection on trauma and visual culture (the subjects range from genocide to Vietnam home movies), Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas observe that

² *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. I, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, Early English Text Society, s.s., 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). All references to the Chester plays come from this edition. For a suggestive discussion of the language of 'hopping' in relation to the Dance of Death in English and Continental traditions, see Sophie Oosterwijk, 'Lessons in "Hopping": The Dance of Death and the Chester Mystery Cycle', *Comparative Drama*, 36 (2002–03), 249–87.

³ Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 8.

⁴ The historicity of the massacre is hotly disputed. 'Most recent biographies of Herod the Great deny it entirely', claims Paul L. Maier in 'Herod and the Infants of Bethlehem', in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II*, ed. by Jerry Vardaman (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 169–90 (p. 170).

Visual studies have taken up the task of historicizing the role of the image and visual representation in modern regimes of truth and knowledge. Trauma studies have sought to redeem the category of the real by connecting it to the traumatic historical event, which presents itself precisely as a representational limit, and even a challenge to imagination itself. Trauma studies thus offer poststructuralist theory a means to reintroduce a political and ethical stake in the representation of the real without regressing to the very notions of mimetic transparency it has striven to overturn. Trauma studies consistently return to an iconoclastic notion of the traumatic event as that which simultaneously demands urgent representation but shatters all potential frames of comprehension and reference.⁵

For the medieval audience the slaughter of the innocents is a traumatic event proleptic of the murder of Christ and imbued with anti-Semitic hatred for, in the phrase of Geoffrey Chaucer's Prioress, the 'cursed folk of Herodes al newe'.⁶ It is impossible to capture in art, impossible to fix in time. The soldiers of Herod killed the innocents in the biblical past; in the medieval performative present they kill them freshly/again in front of the believing audience of a particular town; that audience knows that the play will be performed again in the future. The massacre plays are temporally decontextualized and paradoxical celebrations of trauma. Of course the thing itself, the original act or acts, can never be fully recuperated: the traumatic historical event is a representational limit.

The massacre plays nevertheless insist on the urgency of the search for and representation of lost time. The lost past is real in the sense that it is a shaping cultural force. The massacre of the innocents is a medieval iconic event, by which I mean, in the terms of Patricia Leavy, that it is constructed as

integral to the public's perception of the past, and by extension, the present and the future. [...] Iconic events have become a vehicle through which 'nation' is articulated, and so too are these events critical to the renegotiation of that identity, at times via purposeful political challenge, or resistance within popular culture.⁷

A preoccupation with nation-building is not appropriate here, but acculturation more broadly can substitute. Like Guerin and Hallas, Leavy concerns herself with events the modern reader might not normally juxtapose with medieval plays — the Titanic, Pearl Harbor, 9/11. It remains a useful exercise to consider the parallels:

⁵ Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, 'Introduction', in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, ed. by Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London: Wallflower, 2007), pp. 1–23 (p. 3).

⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Prioress's Prologue* and *The Prioress's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 209–11 (p. 211, line 574).

⁷ Patricia Leavy, *Iconic Events in Popular Culture: Media Politics and Power in Retelling History* (Lanham: Lexington, 2007), p. 187.

iconic events shape culture through a 'combination of recollection, anticipation, and projection' in medieval and modern visual representations alike.⁸ The parallel problematics of lost history and the impossibility of mimesis need not be lost in a comparative mode. Leonardo diCaprio's watery death has as little to do with reality in any historical sense as the sex-changed doll of Chester, though both leave female voices to articulate stories of trauma and loss. The interesting question that arises is how the massacre plays, as iconic events, are situated with regard to the negotiation of late medieval cultural identity in England.

Firstly, there is no single medieval dramatic context. Context is a term of convenience, or possibly inconvenience, used when considering a group of plays united by theme but separated by specifics (their own contexts). Secondly, this context even in its limited sense is one in which stability, such a key concept for the medieval imagination, is impossible. Medieval biblical plays, perhaps especially the cycle plays, resist stability: old becomes new becomes old again, imperfection and sin hamper every movement, and there is no perfection possible in this earthly life, whether in terms of mimesis or a life without sin. 'This worlde unstable', as Malory's Galahad terms it, invites a drama of mutability, and the Middle English plays of the slaughter of the innocents provide just that.⁹ High and low, serious and unserious, sacred and secular, painful and pleasurable — these plays on the darkest of subjects shift modes with a speed that can seem dizzying to the modern reader. Nor are the massacre plays alone in their mixing of discourses. Probably the most famous example of the free admixture of high and low in medieval English drama is the Towneley *Second Shepherd's Play* which so cheekily conflates man and sheep, Lamb and lamb, God and man, sacred and supper. The second shepherd of the Towneley *Second Shepherd's Play* asks Mak, 'Is your chyld a knaue?' (line 800).¹⁰ Mak's reply marks the beginning of an extended verbal production of identity for his child, a lamb in a crib, as he observes: 'Any lord myght hym haue, | Thys chyld, to his son' (lines 801–02). Mak's reply highlights the ways in which the claims he is making could literally be made by anyone, any player, any time. It also draws attention to the processes by which his claims, and the props that support his claims

⁸ Leavy, *Iconic Events in Popular Culture*, p. 152.

⁹ Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 607.

¹⁰ Excerpts from 'Play 13: Second Shepherds' Play' and 'Play 16: Herod the Great', in *The Towneley Plays*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Text*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society, s.s., 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). All references to the Towneley plays are from this edition.

(cradle and swaddling), work to make it possible for a sheep to pass, for however long, as a son. As with the doll in Chester, so with the lamb in Towneley: genders and identities — species even — are constructed on the spot, and then deconstructed. What is at stake in Towneley is nothing less than the Nativity, just as the martyrdom of the children of Bethlehem lies at the heart of the massacre plays.

Stability is impossible, and history is elusive, but fantasy is consistently available, and fantasy, as we have just seen, is both playful and deadly serious. Given the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, the Middle English soldiers of Herod have much to reveal about the functions of the imagined absent other. J. Harold Ellens suggests that Christians, through centuries of processes of mimetic violence, have effectively imagined themselves as living in the days of the Jewish fathers. The allure of that imaginative process is this thought: *we* would not have killed Christ (or the innocents, the stand-ins for Christ).¹¹ The paradox, of course, is that this violence is necessary to the known salvation narrative, planned out by an all-knowing God. Given these tensions, prejudices, and paradoxes, it is particularly fascinating to consider how fantasies of the culpable other play out, time and again, along gendered lines. Strategies of up/down conflation (us/them, saved Catholic/evil Jew) in the massacre plays frequently, even consistently, depend on gendered transformations or discourses of gender performance.

Jody Enders, in a discussion of pedagogical violence in medieval rhetoric and law, describes 'a disfiguring mnemotechnics which founds trenchant distinctions between men and women as the recipients of pedagogical violence'.¹² Given the well-known didactic functions of the medieval theatre — it was more likely that the average person would learn about scripture from English plays than Latin preaching — this is also a key issue for the critical analysis of the violence of the massacre plays. Enders, speaking of French medieval drama, points to an 'epistemological process that sometimes begins with rhetoric as it helps rhetoric to begin: the revelations and concealments of an *ars memorandi* that activates distinct desires to harm women'.¹³ William Ian Miller observes in yet another context, that of medieval Iceland, that 'victimizers, according to our common notions, will tend

¹¹ J. Harold Ellens, 'Introduction: The Interface of Religion, Psychology, and Violence', in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. by J. Harold Ellens, 4 vols (Westport: Praeger, 2004), II, 1–10.

¹² Jody Enders, 'Rhetoric, Coercion, and the Memory of Violence', in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996), pp. 24–55 (p. 36).

¹³ Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 92.

to be male, and victims, if not female to the same extent as victimizers are male, will, in many settings, be gendered female nonetheless'.¹⁴ His choice of phrase, 'gendered female', is suggestive. Of course, the innocents themselves are the victims in the English massacre plays — young boys killed in the place of Christ, and thereby martyrs. But the innocents are voiceless and are played by dolls so that their bodies can be mutilated in performance. The voices that speak for the dead and speak of harm, anger, pain, suffering, and victimization are those of the mothers — gendered female, within the special confines of the medieval theatrical *ars memorandi*.

The Chester, Towneley, York, Digby, and N-Town massacre plays all focus primary attention on the resisting mothers. They are aggressive and defensive, violent and victimized, punitive and punished, angry and sad — and funny. The plays routinely offer scenarios in which physically aggressive women insult Herod's soldiers and act violently upon their bodies — offering them, of course, comic buffets, a classic form of female/transvestite violence, key in conjugal farces such as the Noah plays. 'And on buffett with this bote | thou shalt have to boote!' cries the first mother of Chester (lines 355–56). Female/transvestite aggression has entertaining features in the massacre plays of Chester, York, Towneley, N-Town, and Digby alike. Certainly it is worth pondering why this violence is one of the big laughs of the medieval theatre. The humour of course draws upon many of the comic and disruptive strands associated traditionally with the Feast of the Innocents. Theresa Coletti points out that

The major *topoi* of the feast of the Innocents — succession, reversal, and substitution — all emphasize hierarchy as a fundamental principle of social structure. Central to the image of society constructed by the feast of the Innocents are categories of status difference. [...] manhood in the Digby Massacre is principally constructed in oppositional relation to the profane body of female maternal and sexual power. [...] the serious import of the biblical event is virtually eclipsed by the comic, physical struggle between the soldiers and the mothers of the Innocents, attempting to protect their children from Herod's command.¹⁵

Comic strands do function temporarily and partly to mitigate the audience's sense of being confronted with horrific violence. Yet through the organized juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy, the contours of both emerge more clearly, and it is also evident that some particular forms of violence are deployed to distract the

¹⁴ William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 55, as quoted in Enders, *Medieval Theatre of Cruelty*, p. 92.

¹⁵ Theresa Coletti, 'Genealogy, Sexuality and Sacred Power: The Saint Anne Dedication of the Digby *Candlemas Day and the Killing of the Children of Israel*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29 (1999), 25–59 (p. 30).

audience from other particular forms of violence. The plays of the slaughter of the innocents develop the innocents' mothers into comic figures — drag queens of a sort since they are played by male actors, both aggressive and explicitly identified with maternity, thus hyperfeminine in some sense — whose resistance to the soldiers of Herod, however ineffectual in preventing the massacre itself, spreads disorder, invites jokes, and sometimes inspires terror among the soldiers. This resistance has functions that run parallel to the violence the soldiers inflict on the innocents themselves.

In the Chester play the soldiers are initially seen to be ambivalent about their grim errand; the first soldier describes it as 'a villanye' and the second soldier protests to Herod that 'to kyll such a conjoyne | mee shames sore' (lines 155, 166–67). Their reluctance to kill women and children is quickly suppressed, however, and they are next seen boasting about their prowess — a deliberate irony, which highlights the cowardly nature of their errand. The first soldier promises that he will kill the children 'stowtly with strokes' and the second soldier boasts of his past exploits, promising also to 'dinge | these laddes everychone' (lines 235–36). There is amusement to be derived from self-congratulation in such a shameful context; however, it is an uneasy humour, and the unevenness of their reactions — from shame to self-congratulation in an instant — shows up some of the tensions of the situation. The humour does not grow simpler in the course of the confrontation between mothers and soldiers. The first soldier urges speed and efficiency: 'Have donne, fellowes, hie fast, | that these queanes weare downe cast, | and the children in thrust' (lines 289–91). The second soldier agrees. The confrontation then takes the shape of an exchange of insults between mothers and soldiers — the first mother cries 'Whom callest thou "queane", scabde dog?' and insults the soldier's mother, while the second mother threatens to use her distaff as a weapon (line 297). Threats on both sides continue. The strategy is one of deflection; attention is directed at the soldiers and the mothers, not the children. The violence of the situation punctures this deflection at several moments, however, as it does when the second soldier uses the language of game and play to describe his murder of a child:

Dame, thy sonne, in good faye,
hee must of me learne a playe:
hee must hopp, or I goe awaye,
upon my speare end. (lines 321–24)

This playful language persists throughout the remainder of the confrontation between the mothers and soldiers, as we recall from the earlier discussion of the mother who tries to claim that her son is a daughter: there, too, the soldier offers to teach her child 'a playe'. The self-consciousness of this language draws out some

of the shifts key to the particular instability of representation in the massacre plays: murder/play/murder.

The mothers' grief — however much they are hyperfeminized or made to seem comic by voicing crude insults or striking people with distaffs — is recognized in performance. 'Owt, owt, and woe is me!' cries the first mother, 'My chyld is dead; now I see | my sorrowe may not cease' (lines 345, 347–48). Her struggles are also seen to be useless against the superior force of the soldiers — and useless against the inevitabilities of biblical story. When Herod's own child is slain in the Chester play, the second mother explains to Herod that she could not prevent it: 'so lyttle was my might | when they beganne to fraye' (lines 407–08). The mothers are at once aggressive and powerless, resisting and defeated, angry and full of grief. The efforts put into developing their resistance are distinctive, in imaginative terms, as it is a resistance that cannot be allowed to succeed.

The Towneley play of *Herod the Great* develops a similar trajectory, with soldiers pitted against mothers, exchanging insults and blows; the mothers once again resist, and once again their resistance fails. The first soldier promises Herod 'We shall for youre sake | Make a dulfull lake' (lines 465–66). The killings themselves receive a less playful treatment than in the Chester play, and the soldiers mock the uselessness of the mothers' resistance. 'What, hoore, art thou woode?' says the first soldier, and the first mother answers with: 'Outt, alas, my chyldys bloode! | Outt, for reprefee!' (lines 492–94). The second mother begs for mercy: 'Mercy, lord, I cry!' (line 505). Each mother in turn cries out for vengeance, but the soldiers respond with jeers. Though the mothers of the Innocents benefit briefly from their physical strength — even masculinization — in their confrontations with the soldiers, it can never be enough to let them win this fight. The subsequent self-congratulation of the soldiers in front of Herod, as they boast of their killings — 'mordred haue we | Many thowsandys' (lines 606–07) — marks a transition from antic disposition to moral seriousness; again the shifts are abrupt and shocking, each mode highlighting the other.

The York *Slaughter of the Innocents* develops the self-sacrifice and sorrow of the mothers more fully. 'Allas for doule, I dye, | To saue my son schall I, | Aye-whils my liff may last', cries the second mother, while the first one adds: 'To dye I haue no drede | I do þe wele to witte, | To saue my sone so dere' (lines 199–201, 204–06).¹⁶ The emphasis is on the terrible lot of these women, as defined through their

¹⁶ 'Play XIX: The Slaughter of the Innocents', in *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982). All quotations from the York massacre play are taken from this edition.

maternal roles: 'And I hadde but hym allone', mourns the second mother (line 214). The York first mother makes explicit the play's reliance on an interpretive mode in which women are mainly present as maternal vessels, and are depicted primarily in relation to dead sons, male abuses, and mourning:

Allas þat we wer wroughte
In worlde women to be,
þe barne þat wee dere bought
þus in oure sighte to see
Disputuously spill. (lines 226–30)

The sadness of this identification leaps out at the feminist critic. If the masculinization of these women again permits them to fight, it is their feminine qualities that make it inevitable that they will lose. To turn to Laura Mulvey, this is 'resistance, in which the power of masculinity can be used as a postponement against the power of patriarchy'.¹⁷ The function of these resisting women? To postpone inevitable events. The waste of human life is highlighted sharply by Herod's reaction to the soldiers' performance of their duties: 'For in waste haue 3e wrought,' says Herod, acknowledging the futility of his actions and those of his servants (line 271).

The Digby play of *Candlemas Day and the Kylling of þe Children of Israelle* makes perhaps the strongest use of the antic disposition made available through the doomed aggression of the mothers. Watkyn's exaggerated terrors draw out the potential that lies in the space between physical body and performed character, as his reaction highlights the in-between-ness of the mothers. Watkyn admits that 'I drede no thyng more thanne a woman with a rokke!' (line 159).¹⁸ What is the point, the meaning, of this fear of a woman with a distaff? The effect is to make him look cowardly and ridiculous, of course, but also to draw the audience's attention to the resisting mothers. This effect is intensified by Watkyn's plan of attack:

And this I promyse you, that I shalle neuer slepe,
But euermore wayte to fynde the children alone,
And if the moder come in, vnder the benche I wille crepe,
And mye stille ther tylle she be goon!
Than manly I shalle come out and hir children sloon!

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)', in *Contemporary Film Theory*, ed. by Antony Easthope (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 125–34 (p. 133).

¹⁸ 'Candlemas Day and the Killing of the Children of Israel', in *Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160*, ed. by Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy, and Louis B. Hall, Early English Text Society, o.s., 283 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). All references to the Digby massacre play are from this edition.

And when I haue don, I shalle renne fast away!
 If she founde hir child dede, and toke me ther alone,
 Be my feith, I am sure we shuld make a fray! (lines 185–92)

For this sort of humour to work, Watkyn's terror must be a ludicrous one, and indeed we know that the mothers of the Innocents cannot win their fights: there is no room for that reversal in this narrative trajectory. Watkyn's terror disgusts Herod and amuses the knights who accompany him. He tells the soldiers: 'The most I fere is to come amonge women, | For thei fight like deuelles with ther rokkes whan þei spynne!' (lines 223–24). Once again, the image of the spinning woman — Eve's traditional labour after the fall — carries a great deal of weight, at once comic and tragic.

Watkyn's fears prompt the other soldiers to praise his manliness, in an ironic manner. 'Watkyn, I loue the, for thu art euer a man!' comments the first soldier, while the second soldier urges Watkyn to 'quyte the manly amonge the wyves' (lines 225, 230). There is an ugly undercurrent to this humour; the second soldier goes on to describe the women as 'fers as a lyon in a cage, | Whan þei are broken ought, to reve men of þer lives!' (lines 231–32). While the soldier is clearly feeding Watkyn's terror for the audience's viewing pleasure, the knowledge of what is about to occur is disruptive and unsettling. It is not the men whose lives will be reft away, and everyone knows it. The humour is marred by an inevitable foreknowledge, and the effect is an affirmation of what is already known: that there is no real need to fear the mothers.

This is borne out in the remainder of the play, and yet the development of the mothers' resistance is striking, as the play openly discusses the futility of this resistance while also, at some level, approving of it. If Watkyn's terror provides a backwards reassurance that there is no need to fear women, the treatment of female resistance in this play offers a sort of backwards accolade: they are right to resist. The fourth mother cries out to the murdering soldiers: 'But we women shalle make ageyns you resistsens, | After oure power, youre malice to encomber!' (lines 303–04). Watkyn replies:

Peas, you folysshe quenys! Wha shuld you defende
 Ageyns vs armed men in this appaile?
 We be bold men, and the kyng vs ded sende
 Hedyr into this cuntre to hold with you bataile! (lines 305–08)

Yes, this resistance against armed men is doomed, though of course Watkyn is not bold and this is not a battle in an ordinary sense, something that is highlighted in the ensuing discourses of knighthood and bravery. 'I wille not faile | To dubbe the knyght with my rokke rounde!' promises the first mother (lines 310–11). Our

attention is caught both by this image and by its subsequent reiteration by the other women. But in the course of the insulting and fighting and jokes about knighthood and attacking with distaffs, the children are killed: '*Hic occidunt pueros*' (stage direction, p. 106). And that is that. Though this is the central event of the play, no further descriptive effort is made, no special choreography is assigned to the moment. Far more descriptive effort goes into the continued resistance and grief of the mothers, even though their resistance is now after the fact and has transformed into a mix of anger and sorrow. They keep on fighting, and they continue to talk about making Watkyn a knight with their *rokkes*. The comic energy persists weirdly beyond the deaths of the children, and yet it has its imponderable qualities: who can say which other messages, to do with what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, with the value of resistance against impossible odds, have really been learned?

The mothers do get to beat Watkyn, in the end: a stage direction specifies that '*Here thei shalle bete Watkyn, and the knyghtes shalle come to rescue hym*' (p. 108). The satisfactions to be derived from this scene are complicated. Watkyn's fear of women turns out to be justified, but only at a very individual level and only after the children are dead, and only when the women are men in any case. The intent seems to be the deflection of attention from the Innocents to the mothers and to various comic strands — the loss of life, however, cannot be perfectly contained or hidden. Herod himself speaks of it, crying 'I haue slayn my frendes as my foon!' (line 367). His grief and terror drive him to death in front of the audience, and he collapses: 'My legges faltre, I may no lengere stande!' (line 388).

N-Town's *Slaughter of the Innocents* develops the conflict between the mothers and the soldiers only briefly. The murder of the children takes place before the mothers say anything, and is again treated very briefly. Then the first mother speaks:

Longe lullynge haue I lorn!
 Alas! Qwhy was my baron born?
 With swappyng swerde now is he shorn,
 Be heed ryght fro þe nekke!

 Shanke and shulderyn is al to-torn!
 Sorwyn I se behyndyn and befor,
 Both mydnyth, mydday, and at morn —
 On my lyff I ne recke! (lines 89–96)¹⁹

¹⁹ 'Play 20: Slaughter of the Innocents', in *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*, ed. by Stephen Spector, Early English Text Society, s.s., 11–12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). All references to the N-Town massacre play are from this edition.

Like so many of the other massacre plays, N-Town develops a language of play and game: the second mother mourns the loss of all her 'good game', and the first soldier celebrates the 'good game' he had in killing the children (lines 98, 222). The soldiers and Herod agree among themselves that no one could have escaped from their killing spree. However, the audience knows better: Christ has escaped. Resistance may be useless for almost all mothers, but there is always the exception of Mary: her resistance, her flight, succeeds. While the women themselves in the N-Town play do not resist, and are seen instead in postures of mourning, all of the massacre plays remind us of the impossibility of exerting perfect control over one's environment. They expose the fictions of torture and control. Things fall apart; resistance may be generally useless, but it is still approved, and important — and, exceptionally, it may work. N-Town's Herod may have 'no dowte' that his plan has worked, but the Virgin's son is not among the dead (line 230). His plans are about to go even further awry — Death now intervenes personally to kill Herod and his soldiers and to have the last word in a literal way, warning the audience: 'Beware of me' (line 260).

What are the lessons to be learned from Watkyn's terror? Coletti argues that the emphasis throughout the play is on 'gender conflict and the threat of feminine power grounded in the maternal body'.²⁰ But perhaps Watkyn's fear of the maternal is not solely or primarily of a sort that empowers the female body — or even has much to do with it — for it is a terror that is also constructed in relation to the cross-dressed male body, a terror of in-between-ness acted out. In the massacre plays, one form of violence distracts the audience from another and makes it possible for the murder of the Innocents to become something smaller and more occluded: '*hic occident pueros*'. It is a brilliant deployment of a third sex in performance. Both the relative efficacy of these women in physical combat and the humour to be derived from being terrified of them appear to be, at least in part, functions of their actually being cross-dressers — something that is inevitably made more evident in the moments of their physical confrontations with Herod's soldiers, as the audience's attention is drawn again and again to the bodies in action. Stage action focuses attention on the body at the same time that dialogue insists on their maternal identifications. The mothers are poised between revelation and concealment, between genders, between meanings: they are representationally unstable.

The massacre plays' emphases on gendered conflict over the disposition of children does draw out anxieties about paternity, patriarchy, and lineage. Coletti

²⁰ Coletti, 'Genealogy, Sexuality and Sacred Power', p. 31.

rightly observes that 'these plays call attention not only to patriarchy's self-destructive capacities but also its desire to purge the public realm of the maternal itself'.²¹ And yet the maternal is also seen to be attainted, funny, disruptive, problematic. An emphasis on the importance of maternal bodies in the massacre plays can fall easily into the tendency to discuss the mothers of the innocents in a manner entirely abstracted from their status as cross-dressers. At the thematic level, it is clear that there are multiple anxieties being expressed about maternity, paternity, the disposition of children, and other issues of essential importance to the heterosexual family and state. However, it is also clear that these plays, like the Noah plays, are not seriously invested in naturalistic representations of femininity, or in female subjectivity in any simple sense. Direct and vigorous, if not ultimately successful, participation in physical contests with men inevitably keeps the audience's attention poised between verbal and physical revelations. Sexual liminality is brought to the fore whenever there is a moment of violent confrontation that is meant to crystallize or represent gender oppositions. The massacre plays, with their resisting mothers, make some strong moves to capitalize on the humorous potential of cross-dressed men attacking other men with women's weapons — distaffs, household objects. Returning to the question of what is learned from Watkyn's terror, the answer appears to be that his fear exposes the constructedness of female defeats. Not just humour, not just cross-dressing; this is a kind of third-sex violence which is developed to deflect attention from other violence, killings, suppressions. When the first mother tells the first soldier in the Chester play, 'I shall cracke thy crowne', he moves on smoothly to kill her child; only once the child is dead does her real tirade begin, and she attacks him several times (line 198). The trajectory of her resistance, as with that of all the mothers, is to be ineffectual when it is truly important. But the fact of resistance persists. Its premises cannot be dismissed, and the manner in which one group acts out an inevitable defeat is disturbing.

The blending of the carnivalesque and the biblical that takes place in such figures as Noah's wife and the mothers of the innocents is typical of what Kristina Simeonova, writing about the aesthetic functions of the carnivalesque within medieval drama, has called 'peripheral merging,' a state in which selected, and non-central, biblical structures or characters are carnivalized:

the dramatic interpretation promotes them as central by focusing the interest on them. The carnivalesque and the biblical blend and exchange meanings. Peripheral figures such as the mothers in the Massacre plays, Noah's wife in the Deluge plays, Herod, Pilate, and all the Roman magistrates in the Buffeting, Scourging, Crucifixion, and Conspiracy plays

²¹ Coletti, 'Genealogy, Sexuality and Sacred Power', p. 42.

serve as conductors of the carnivalesque. [...] The low comedy culminates in the Massacre plays, where the terror inherent in the slaughter of the innocents gives way to a carnival beating and uncrowning: the boisterous mothers attack the soldiers with their distaffs and kitchen pottery. Both the soldiers and the mothers regard the massacre as a game. Grotesque images relate their act to the paradigm of a ritual beating off of the old King and at the same time to Saturnalian misrule. The overall effect is one of ambivalent degradation. The audience participates in a ceremony, not of diffusion, but of reversal of the knowledge accepted by the collective consciousness.²²

It is counterintuitive that plays about the mass murder of children should be carnivalized unless this type of interpretation is offered. In terms of the production of culture, the need to infuse the violence of the massacre plays with low comedy and an emphasis on making sex in performance becomes intelligible if seen as an attempt to direct the energies produced by the plays' violence. Yet a functionalist approach cannot explain away these trouble-making mothers or recalcitrant wives. The strategy of category crisis disables containment; the disorderly mothers of the innocents remind us that 'patriarchy does not reproduce itself autonomously'.²³

Laura McClure's work on female roles in fifth-century Greek theatre provides a suggestive formulation, as she advocates a movement away from 'recovering women's historical reality' in favour of 'understanding the conceptual framework behind their literary and mythic representation and relating to it the social and ideological context'.²⁴ Critics of medieval drama are increasingly aware of the importance of unpacking cultural fantasy, and of the many and sophisticated ways in which medieval plays draw our attention to representation as artifice. Medieval biblical plays show us a range of ways in which cross-dressing can be deployed to shore up, oddly enough, a seeming natural order that is at once hierarchic and heterosexual. The third sex is frequently of great use, to the first. But the third sex is never perfectly useful to the first. The massacre plays orbit the idea that the best-laid plans go awry. Transvestism, as a ground of representation for the medieval theatre, makes it impossible for us to dismiss the artifice that sustains the dissemination of biblical story, and the massacre plays in particular remind us that the fantasy of control — control over outcomes, over the bodies of women — is just that, a fantasy.

²² Kristina Simeonova, 'The Aesthetic Function of the Carnavalesque in Medieval English Drama', in *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects*, ed. by David Shepherd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 70–79 (pp. 74–75).

²³ Coletti, 'Genealogy, Sexuality and Sacred Power', p. 43.

²⁴ Laura McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 4.

A return to the York play's emphasis on suffering as synonymous with the maternal state raises the question of why, exactly, the suffering of the innocents is consistently displaced onto the mothers. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that medieval dramatic approaches to pregnancy, labour, and the deaths of children frequently orbit the notion of maternal sufferings as proofs of God's punishment of Eve for the fall of man. Dramatic depictions of Eve's maternal sufferings, and thereafter those of all women — in Chester play II, Eve explains to her sons that she bore them in pain, adding 'and soe shall wemen all' (line 508) — represent maternal sufferings as irrefutable physical proofs of the fall. Moreover, they are proofs of Eve's particularly culpable role in the fall. Rhetoric that affirms the conflation of female suffering, proof of guilt, and punishment for sin can be usefully examined as an 'obsessive display of agency' related to the deliberate infliction of pain; Elaine Scarry points out that it is precisely this display of agency — however false, constructed, or compromised — that 'allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power'.²⁵ In a passage with serious implications for this analysis of the massacre plays, Claire Sponsler links women and Jews as inhabiting spaces of suffering in medieval plays. She describes violence against 'marginalized groups such as Jews or women' as 'especially prevalent' in medieval theatre, adding that

The bodies of women, especially holy women, were also frequently represented as the victims of acts of violation, as for example in Jean Fouquet's illumination of Saint Apollonia in the Hours of Etienne Chevalier, which shows Apollonia having her teeth pulled out as part of her torture, or in the more than a dozen French plays performed between 1448 and 1539 that feature Saint Barbara, who was tortured by having her breasts cut off.²⁶

Let us consider for a moment a form of suffering first experienced by Eve, that of the death of a son, leading us inevitably — and, a key point, via the mothers of the innocents — to the death of Christ. In a fit of remorse, Eve in the N-Town play II, *The Fall of Man*, asks Adam to kill her after the fall, but Adam rebukes her sharply, saying

For yf I xulde sle my wyff,
I sclow myself withowtyn knyff,
In helle logge to lede my lyff,
With woo in wepyng dale. (lines 318–21)

²⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 18.

²⁶ Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 137. See chap. 6, 'Violated Bodies: The Spectacle of Suffering in Corpus Christi Pageants', pp. 136–60, for a fascinating discussion of the socio-economic implications and contexts of the massacre plays.

Eve's weakness, morally and interpretively, is emphasized once again immediately after the fall. Adam's rejection of murder, however, has a dual function; not only does it depend on the dynamic of Eve as guarantor of his superiority, it also serves to make the ensuing murder of Abel more poignant and troubling. Adam's stance against murder is, within the N-Town cycle, a prior gloss on the forthcoming play III, *Cain and Abel*.

The death of Abel is frequently regarded by theologians and dramatists alike as marking the completion of the Fall through the descent of man into murder. Abel's death — and Cain's endless suffering as well — is explicitly blamed on Eve's role in the fall in a wide range of medieval dramatic texts. God in the Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam* informs Eve that 'tes emfanz en dolor naistront, | e en grant anguisse finerunt' ('Your children will be born in sorrow, And will end their days in great anguish') (lines 455–56),²⁷ while the Chester play of the murder of Abel makes the connection more explicit. Eve herself is the one who acknowledges her culpability for the death of her son, crying

Alas, nowe is my sonne slayne!
 Alas, marred is all my mayne!
 Alas, muste I never be fayne,
 but in woe and morninge?
 Well I wott and knowe iwyssse
 that verye vengeance it is.
 For I to God soe did amyssse,
 mone I never have lykinge. (lines 689–96)

The sufferings and deaths of sons, and the maternal sufferings brought about by these pains and deaths, are thus explicitly identified as further outcomes and proofs of the postlapsarian state — and moreover as proofs of God's vengeance on the female sex. Behind the trauma of the massacre is the trauma of the fall, just as the trauma of the Crucifixion is yet to come. One event bleeds — literally — into another, and one category bleeds into another. The massacre plays remind the audience, again and again, that the mothers of the innocents, like the cursed folk of Herod, are not themselves innocent.

²⁷ *Le Jeu d'Adam*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang van Emden, British Rencsesvals Publications, 1 (Edinburgh: Société Rencsesvals British Branch, 1999), pp. 32–33.

POSTSCRIPT/POSTLUDE/AFTERWORD

Derek Pearsall

The nakedness of grief is unbearable. For the one who suffers, it is corrosively unproductive and has no issue unless discharged or negotiated or regulated in some traditionally sanctioned manner. For the observer, sympathy grows exhausted and gives way to guilt at the loss of sensitivity or at the relief of being untouched by such hurt, in a kind of shameful complicity. The simple unbearable grief in the case of the surpassing grief of the mother for the lost child makes it literally unspeakable. There is no life, hardly, to be looked back upon with thanks or celebration, no sense of the fulfilment of a life fully achieved, no conceivable consolation. Such grief is rarely described in literature except within some framework of externally imposed meaning such as is described in the essays in this collection.

One of those rare descriptions is in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, where the fearful anxiety of the widow, and her fear, soon to be brutally confirmed, that her child may be dead, is thus portrayed:

This povre widwe awaiteth al that night
After hir litel child, but he cam noght.
For which, as soone as it was dayes light,
With face pale of drede and bisy thoght,
She hath at scole and elleswhere him soght;
Til finally she gan so fer espye
That he last seyn was in the Jewerye.

With modres pitee in hir brest enclosed,
She goth, as she were half out of hir minde,
To every place wher she hath supposed
By liklihede hir litel child to finde;
And evere on Cristes moder meke and kinde

She cride, and at the laste thus she wroghte:
Among the cursed Jewes she him soghte.¹

The description is deeply poignant and must strike an answering chord of feeling in every mother, or every parent, who has been in fear of such loss. Her grief is made all the more pitiful by the absence of a father or of anyone else who might help her, and the fearful courage she must display in going alone to seek her child among the Jews. The description of her grief, in comparison with that of Mary, which is implicitly invoked, is brief, and it must be brief, for it has no direction, has no 'meaning', and more would be less. A lament here, of the same truth, could be no more than a wordless cry or exclamation.

What Chaucer has done here is to take time within the framework of the story (as a miracle of the Virgin) in order to materialize fully an element in its reality. The widow's grief is necessary to the narrative and as a natural human response to the situation, but it is not elaborated in this way in other versions of the story.² For a writer like Chaucer, however, it is a moment of imaginative authentication that is poetically necessary. The more orthodox and more productively discussible work of the tale soon resumes, demonstrating the usefulness of the child's death as a witness to the power of the Virgin, and the reward that devotion may win. A few Jews are executed. The widow-mother disappears from the story, her grief, so far as we hear, unassuaged.

Griselda too, in the *Clerk's Tale*, loses a child, first one and then another, and believes them both to have been taken away to be killed — a belief that Chaucer makes particular efforts to reinforce, by emphasizing the fierce and brutal aspect of the sergeant who carries them off. But Chaucer is not interested here in a mother's grief. He accepts — though he does not have to, given the powers at his command — that the story he tells is encased in an apparatus of allegorical and exemplary meanings, and he makes his customary oblique, enigmatic, contradictory, and self-ironizing allusions to those meanings, as Rebecca Krug describes in her essay here. What Chaucer develops in his version of the story is not a grieving

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Prioress's Tale*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Jill Mann (London: Penguin, 2005), VII. 586–99. Subsequent citations from the *Tales* refer to this edition.

² See the discussion and quotation of the sources and analogues of the tale in Laurel Broughton's 'The Prioress's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales: II*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, *Chaucer Studies*, 35 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 583–647. The most extended descriptions are the few lines in the Vernon version (p. 602) and the more extended passage in the Latin prose 'De cantu *Alma Redemptoris Mater*' in the late fifteenth-century Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.9.38 (p. 642).

and betrayed mother — our outrage on her behalf is largely an irrelevance — but a Griselda who is conscious throughout of the role that she must play as an exemplar of truth and obedience. He increases the difficulty of this role by deliberately allocating to Walter a special quality, not present in his sources, of almost psychopathic obsessiveness and irrationality in his testing of Griselda. Walter is like a bear tied to the stake of his obsession (IV. 701–05) who must suffer the torments of the fell and cruel hounds of his desires. As Jill Mann puts it, ‘Walter is “bounden” to his cruel obsession; appearing to enjoy complete independence, he is in fact hopelessly enslaved to his own will’.³ In the face of this, Griselda’s two speeches to Walter when he tells her of his plans for their children are expressions of perfect obedience, of even more than perfect obedience: she wishes that she might know his desires before they were expressed so that she might hasten to meet them, or, if dying might please him, that she might die (IV. 659–65).⁴ It is not difficult to recognize the Christian register in which she speaks, and the deeply moving power of the speeches, given their repugnance to natural human feeling, is extraordinary. Only once does she explicitly voice her awareness of her motives, and that is in the address to her daughter, the first to be taken from her: “For this night shaltow dien for my sake” (IV. 560). By ‘for my sake’ she means, ‘in order to preserve the purity of my obedience to my lord and to my promise’. Chaucer does seem to allow to Griselda the expression of an ordinary human feeling when she prefaces her second avowal of obedience with an apparently wry touch of awareness: “I have nat had no part of children tweine | But first, siknesse, and after, wo and peine” (IV. 650–51).⁵ But the purpose of this acknowledgement of the reality of her sacrifice is not, on Chaucer’s part, to let slip the mask that conceals her resentment and outrage, nor, on her part, to offer a veiled reproach to Walter, but to ensure

³ Jill Mann, ‘Parents and Children in the “Canterbury Tales”’, in *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England: The J. A. W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, Perugia, 1981–1982*, ed. by Pietro Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: Brewer; Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1982), pp. 165–83 (see p. 179). Her remarks are developed further in chap. 4, ‘Suffering Woman, Suffering God’, in Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Feminist Readings* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 128–64.

⁴ The full speech is IV. 645–67, and the second speech is IV. 814–89. The parts of the speeches referred to here are added by Chaucer to his sources.

⁵ The deliberate reminder of the pain of childbirth is, as Jill Mann points out, Chaucer’s addition to his source (‘Parents and Children’, p. 182). The exclamation Griselda makes later, when she hears of the plan for her to be cast out, ‘O goode God, how gentil and how kinde | Ye semed, by youre speche and youre visage, | The day that maked was oure mariage!’ (IV. 852–54), is more of a sentimental outburst.

that we all recognize the full magnitude of the sacrifice she has made in order to fulfil the perfection of her obedience.⁶

The maternal solicitude that is excluded from the *Clerk's Tale* is present in the *Man of Law's Tale*, in Constance's cradle-lament over her baby son and the suffering that he must undergo. The pathos of the scene, discussed by Anna Czarnowus above, is touchingly homely, but it is controlled in its impact and given its full contextual meaning by the comparison, which Constance herself makes, between her grief and that of Mary for her son:

‘Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
Thy wo, and any wo man may sustene.
Thow saw thy child yslain before thine eyen,
And yet now liveth my litel child, parfay.’ (II. 846–49)

Constance's grief is probably less important in the economy of the narrative than the image of Constance harried and hustled to the boat by the turbulent crowd:

Have ye nat seyn sometime a pale face
Among a prees, of him that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wheras him gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighte knowe his face that was bistad
Amonges all the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute. (II. 645–51)

The image is that of Christ similarly harassed by the angry and ugly mob as he journeys to his death on Calvary, the solitariness of the pale face powerfully evoked in Bosch's painting of the *Crowning with Thorns* in the National Gallery in London. The child, and Constance's pity for him, are the necessary adjunct to her Christ-like predicament and they make it more pitiful, the work of the cradle-lament being to emphasize what must be suffered for Christ's sake by those who maintain the faith in constancy.

A father's grief for the loss of a child may or may not properly be compared with a mother's, but, as it is expressed in the *Sonatorrek*, the subject of Joe Harris's wide-ranging essay here, it certainly follows a different rhetoric. Egill's lament is not only a conscious re-enactment and re-embodiment of an ancient ritual, that of lamentation for the death of Baldr, it is also the means through which Egill, in composing his lament, is restored to himself. The experience of loss is given a positive

⁶ ‘Griselda turns “subjeccioun” into “governance” by the complete absorption of her vow to be obedient to Walter to her own will’ (Mann, ‘Parents and Children’, p. 179).

outcome, one that is found within. Grief is made meaningful, and therefore bearable, by art, and lament transformed into elegy.⁷

This is not how maternal lamentation works, and it is maternal lamentation that is central to the medieval rhetoric of lament, partly because it is the extremest form of human grief, but more because a special form of it, the *planctus Mariae*, or lamentation of Christ's mother, provided an immediate access to the post-Anselmian devotion to the person of Christ. As the Virgin says, in one of the lyrics discussed by Amy Vines, 'Who cannot wepe, come lerne at me': the mother's grief communicates to us the pity and anguish we must feel for the suffering Christ so that we may understand and love him truly for his sacrifice. As Vines says, this poem and 'Sodenly afraide' are an education in affective devotion. Everything must be done to intensify the experience of grief, not to mitigate it or seek consolation, for the *meaning* of Mary's grief is always present and unassailable, and guaranteed by the part it plays in the divine plan. Her sorrowing for her crucified son is made more poignant and more immediate to the heart of the Christian by the blurring into it of the feelings of joy she had in the child, the pathetic association in the Virgin's mind of the two experiences of the mother, as in the extraordinary poem of *The Lamentacioun of Oure Lady* discussed by Lizzie Towl. The Marian lament is so certain in its fulfilment of its purpose, and so secure in its appropriation of the lament as an art-form, that it can make free with both theology and common sense. Douglas Gray, in his British Academy lecture on pathos in Middle English literature, speaks at some length of the 'unrestrained and passionate gestures and actions of late medieval lament'.⁸ In the *Lamentacioun*, Mary is shown unpicking the angelic Salutation clause by clause, complaining how each promise has been broken; she also reproaches Christ himself, on the cross, because he pays so little attention to her grief. It is not because she has gone mad, as might seem, but because in the extremity of her grief it is permissible for her to say anything: the extremity of her grief is alone relevant. Only if she professed indifference could the form fail to work.

Something of the meaningfulness of Mary's grief is present in the representation of the Massacre of the Innocents in the mystery plays, with their extraordinary mixture of laughter and horror. The raucous repartee of some of the mothers, as Jane Tolmie describes it in her essay, provokes a disturbing duality of response. Yet

⁷ The difference between lament and elegy is discussed in the contextualizing essay of Anne Klinck, above, and in the essay on medieval Latin traditions of lament by Jan Ziolkowski.

⁸ Douglas Gray, "Pite for to here – pite for to se": Some Scenes of Pathos in Late Medieval English Literature', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1994), 67–99 (p. 79).

amidst all the raucous laughter, the virago-like violence of the women and the feeble cowardly bullying of the soldiers, there is a significant reminder of the episode's larger meaning in what Kolve calls the 'strange and ironic lament' of the women:

'Thatt babe thatt ys borne in Bedlem, so meke,
He saue my child and me from velany!'

'There is irony', says Kolve, 'because the villainy they are about to suffer is *for* His sake, *because* of Him; He has come to save them, but in a different time and way from what they now suppose'.⁹ The plays can afford to portray vividly the wild grief and terror of the mothers and the contemptible boasting of the soldiers because they are surrounded by their larger meanings, including in some texts the immediate transport of the children into heaven. Kolve quotes the speech of the Angel at the end of the play of Fleury: 'Sinite paruulos [venire ad me, talium est enim regnum coelorum]' (Suffer the little children to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven), and the stage direction that follows: '*Ad uocem Angeli surgentes Pueri intrent chorum dicentes: O Christe [etc.]*' (At the voice of the Angel let the Boys rise and enter the choir saying, O Christ [etc.]).¹⁰

Of all the poets who wrote of maternal grief in the *planctus Mariae*, none is more sure in his touch than Lydgate. Most of his Marian poems are addresses, prayers, and apostrophes to the Virgin, celebrations and laudations, making an act of worship out of the elaboration of the artefact. The one *planctus*, based on the text 'Quis dabit meo capiti fontem lacrimarum', called in Cambridge, St John's College, MS 56 *A Lamentacioun of our Lady Maria*, is measured in its meditative grief, absent the extravagance of the poems mentioned above.¹¹ The emotional charge is nonetheless strong or perhaps the stronger as a result, and the various topoi of lamentation are skilfully worked in: the sword of sorrow that strikes a cold pain to the heart and numbs all the limbs (lines 29–31, 76–78), the impossibility of finding any sorrow that will compare with hers (lines 45–48), the impossibility of consolation: 'Myn inward sorwys can fynde noon allegaunce, | Ech hour renewyng, it wyl noon other be' (lines 69–70). The poem is in an eight-line ballade

⁹ V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), p. 79. The Coventry play is quoted here as in Kolve.

¹⁰ Kolve, *Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 208. I take this to mean that the children enter heaven: Kolve speaks of their being 'immediately resurrected'.

¹¹ 'Quis Dabit Meo Capiti?', in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part I, The Religious Poems*, ed. by Henry Noble MacCracken, Early English Text Society, e.s., 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), pp. 324–29.

stanza, with a refrain playing variations upon 'To se my sone thus naylled to a tre' but always ending 'naylled to a tre'. This refrain continues unbroken to the end of the poem, providing an insistent reminder of Christ's suffering, even after his sacrifice has been acknowledged as the triumph over death.

Lydgate can also claim the most touching non-Marian lament of maternal loss, in the long threnody composed by Canacee over her baby son as the child lies suckling at her breast.¹² The story is of Canacee's incest with her brother Macareus, the subsequent birth of a child, and the wrath of her father Aeolus, which is to be appeased only by the death of both mother and child. Canacee laments the imminent loss of her child in the form of a long letter to her brother written as she gazes upon the peaceful infant:

'A mouth he hath, but woordis hath he noone,
Can nat compleyne, alas, for non outrage,
Nor gruchith nat, but lith heer al alone,
Stille as a lamb, most meek of his visage.
What herte of steel coude doon to hym damage
Or suffer hym deie, beholdyng the maneer
And look benygne of his tweyne eyen cleer?'¹³

At length, her lament ended, she takes a sword and kills herself:

Hir child fill down, which myhte nat asterte,
Havyng non helpe to socoure hym nor save,
But in hir blood the silf began to bathe. (I.7033–35)

The child is thrown out and devoured by dogs. The story derives from Ovid, *Heroides* 11, some version of which may have been known to Lydgate. It is likely that he also knew the touching treatment of the story in Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, III.143–336. For Gower, the recounting of the story was part of a serious debate about the blamelessness of brother-sister love according to 'natural law', and his main criticism is of the intemperate anger of the father Aeolus. The grief of the mother thus had a meaning beyond itself in the confessional scheme of the *Confessio* and its analysis of the Seven Deadly Sins. Lydgate enters no debate, but

¹² This claim can be made for English literature only, given the account of Christine de Pizan's world of melancholy lamentation in the essay of Nadia Margolis above.

¹³ John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, ed. by Henry Bergen, Early English Text Society, e.s., 121–24, 4 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1918–19), I, 6931–37, but quoted here from *Chaucer to Spenser: An Anthology of Writings in English 1375–1575*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 364.

exploits the pathos of the situation with skill and feeling. For him, pathos is sufficient in itself and needs no consoling explanation or rationalization: the story simply 'Concludith on myscheef and furious cruelte' (I.7042). What Lydgate has done, as is apparent, is to transfer the blameless unreasoning purity of Mary's grief to a secular context.

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